

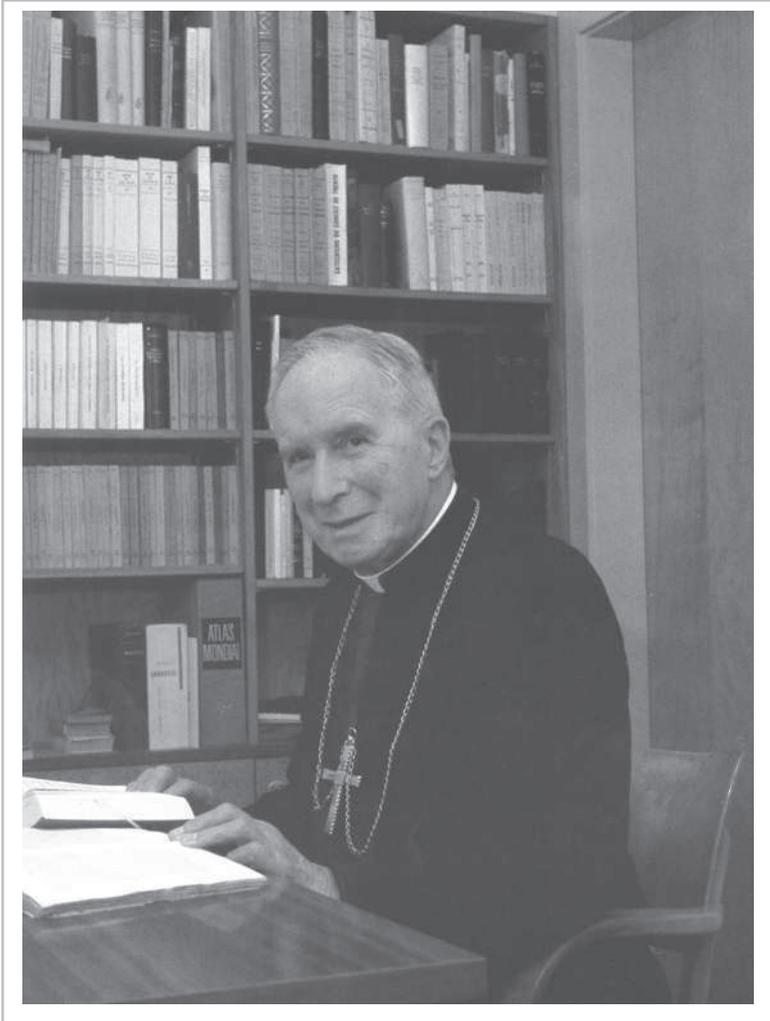
ARCHBISHOP
MARCEL LEFEBVRE

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
Credimus Caritati



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Words and Writings of
Archbishop MARCEL LEFEBVRE

Arranged and presented by
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priest of the Society of Saint Pius X



THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

English translation by ANN MARIE TEMPLE.

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THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- Against the Heresies*, Angelus Press, 1997.
- A Bishop Speaks: Writings and Addresses 1963-1976*, Angelus Press, 2007.
- I Accuse the Council!*, Angelus Press, 1982.
- The Little Story of My Long Life: The Life of Archbishop Lefebvre as Told by Himself*, Angelus Press, 2007.
- The Mass of All Time: The Hidden Treasure*, compiled by Fr. Patrick Troadec, Angelus Press, 2007.
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Fr. PATRICK TROADEC

PREFACE

Near the end of his life, Archbishop Lefebvre had the idea of composing a volume on the spiritual life based on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In 1987 he told his seminarians,

“If God gives me the grace, I would like to try to draw the spirituality of St. Thomas out of the *Summa Theologica*. By his holiness and by the depth of his insight, the Angelic Doctor in his *Summa* provides all of the elements we need to make our spiritual life really flourish. If we follow it, we can be absolutely certain of basing our spiritual life on a solid and a stable foundation. Our spiritual life needs to be connected to divine realities. The *Summa Theologica* is Christocentric. It revolves around our Lord.”¹

The founder of the Society of Saint Pius X was not able to carry out his project in the too little time which remained to him to live. He did leave us a *Spiritual Journey*, however, which already sketches out the broad lines of the spiritual life; and most of all we possess recordings of a great many of his sermons, conferences and spiritual retreats, where he is continually presenting the basic truths of the Christian life.

This work was written from those sources. Though it may not correspond perfectly to the initial project of Archbishop Lefebvre, it nonetheless approaches his design insofar as the present work is based essentially on the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas. The words of the bishop are also penetrated with the Fathers of the Church and with the spirit of

¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 1, 1987.

the liturgy, and above all they are imbued with a spirit of faith and with love for our Lord. In his conferences to seminarians, Archbishop Lefebvre often referred as well to the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, and he loved to introduce them to the beautiful pages of books of the 20th century such as *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, by Fr. Froget, *Christ: The Ideal of the Monk*, by Dom Marmion, or excerpts from the writings of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange. The present volume contains passages from each of these works. The same tone runs through all of these references, as the Archbishop draws in authors from such a variety of periods, all recognized for their piety and for the solidity of their doctrine, always in a language that is clear, precise and, most of all, nourishing for the soul.

In a way, this book is a catechism of the interior life. It begins with the description of truths to be believed, continues by indicating the path to take in order to answer our vocation as baptized Catholics, and ends with a presentation of the means of sanctification.

As he turns these pages, the attentive and generous reader will be touched by the depth and simplicity of these thoughts of Archbishop Lefebvre, and he will certainly feel a new courage to advance toward Heaven with steps of love.

By his contact with these lines, may the reader drink at the sources of living water which animated Archbishop Lefebvre; by them, may the Archbishop continue to form generations of zealous Catholics, devoted, enflamed by love for our Lord and for the Holy Catholic Church.

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

Bishop BERNARD FELLAY

FOREWORD

After the posthumous books of Archbishop Lefebvre, *The Mass of All Time* and *Priestly Holiness*, first published by Clovis Editions in 2005 and 2008, here now is a third volume entitled *The Spiritual Life* and presented under the same form.

Entrusted as I am with the responsibility of forming French-speaking seminarians during their year of spirituality at Flavigny-sur-Ozerain (Côte d'Or), I wanted to gather in a single volume the words of Archbishop Lefebvre on the subject of the life of the soul. The words of the great bishop are indeed an inexhaustible well-spring of meditation proper to nourish in the faithful their union with God, to encourage them on the field of spiritual combat and to draw them higher in the practice of Christian virtues.

A selection had to be made among the retreats, sermons and conferences of the prelate, stretching over a period of more than fifty years, between 1938 and 1990, in view of emphasizing certain essential principles of the interior life.² The two key volumes which have served as a basis for this book are *Spiritual Conferences*, a collection of conferences delivered at Mortain (1945-1947), and *Spiritual Journey* (1990).

What we present is therefore not meant as an exhaustive treatise on spirituality, but as a presentation of its fundamental aspects. A short time before his death, Archbishop Lefebvre wrote, "Our mind is sanctified in the truth which is taught to it, which does not come from our mind. Our will is sanctified in the law and the grace of the Lord, which do not come from our will."³

² We have retained the style of the spoken word, but the original text has been slightly modified in some passages in order to eliminate a certain amount of inevitable repetition and to employ the terms most accessible to the reader.

³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 88; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 70.

That objective truth is what will be presented throughout these pages, taking inspiration in particular from the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas.

One of the favorite themes of Archbishop Lefebvre is charity. The subtitle of this volume is therefore his episcopal motto: *Credidimus caritati*, "We have believed in charity" (1 John 4:8). The former superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers had delved most particularly into this great mystery of charity.

"Charity, he said, "is the key to the mystery of God - if there is a key to that mystery - and at the same time the key to the mystery of our own life. Because we are made in the image of God, we can have no other tendencies, no other desires except to love. We are born with this desire to love God and love our neighbor."⁴

The first part of the work concerns God and His love for men. Indeed, the interior life consists in dwelling in the company of the divine Master in order to allow ourselves to be modeled, formed by His Spirit. Thus, after looking to God, the reader is drawn to discover the wonders that God operates in a soul in the state of grace. And "who would not love in return one who has so loved us?"⁵ However, to correspond to what God expects of us, we have to eliminate the obstacles to His reign and cooperate with His action by the practice of the Christian virtues. Doing so presupposes that we know both the frailty and the promise of our soul. This study is the object of the second part of the work. It will remain then to see what means God has instituted by His Son to allow man to put off the old man and clothe himself in the new man. Finally, the book closes with the blessed life with God, who awaits man beyond his passage through the gates of eternity.

Although this collection was organized using words addressed for the most part to seminarians, priests and religious, it is entirely adapted to any of the faithful who are seeking a profound spiritual life.

⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

⁵ From the Christmas hymn *Adeste Fideles*: "Sic nos amantem quis non redamaret?"

Archbishop Lefebvre in fact said, "People often exaggerate the difference between the interior life of someone in the world and the interior life of a nun, of a priest, of a missionary. There is only one kind of spiritual life, one way to unite ourselves to God, one kind of justification, only one love of souls, because there is only one Jesus Christ, exemplary cause and model of every man who comes into this world. 'He chose us in Himself before the beginning of the world so that we might be holy' (Eph. 1:4). To become other Christs, not on the outside but on the inside, to model our souls on His: there is the ideal for every soul on this earth."⁶

Archbishop Lefebvre lived so close to God that he managed to render accessible the highest truths, basing himself on the most solid principles of the Angelic Doctor. That is the reason his words are ultimately so rich in meaning, so profound and so nourishing for the soul. Certainly, the reader will need to adapt the discourse of the prelate to his own situation. He may use it to gain an overall view of the Christian life, but also to refresh his notions of the catechism, or else to foster his prayer life. Depending on his circumstances, he might only read a paragraph and find there a few good thoughts able to enlighten his whole day.

Our Lord said, "*This is everlasting life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ*" (Jn. 17:3). Dear readers, may this volume allow you to know a little better that extraordinary life which God willed us to begin here below, that you might live it already, until the day you rejoice in it fully in the blessed eternity of Heaven.

Fr. PATRICK TROADEC

*All of the texts presented in this volume were written or taught by Archbishop Lefebvre. I have simply inserted brief presentations or commentaries in italics throughout the book.*⁷

⁶ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

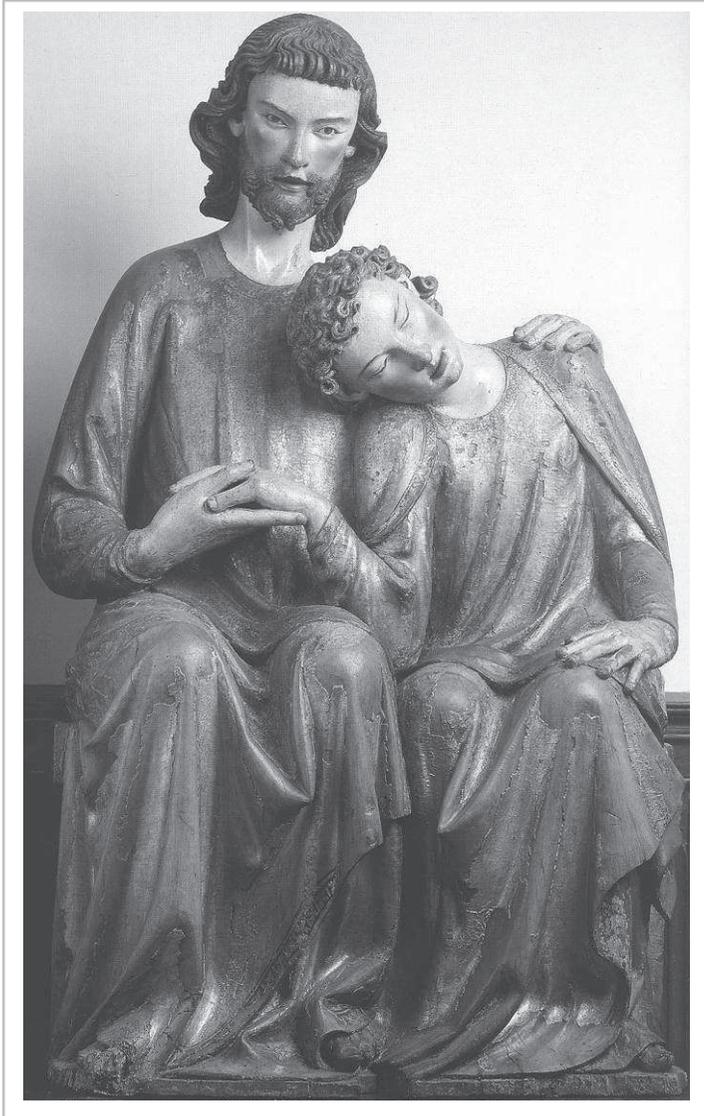
⁷ A glossary at the end of the volume gives the meaning of certain philosophical or theological terms and certain historical references.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Bl. Blessed
- D. Distinction
- DS H. Denzinger & A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, revised numbering.
- DZ H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, original numbering; English translations by Roy J. Deferrari in *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, MO, 1957.
- Ethic:* *Sententia libri Ethicorum*
- Fr. Father
- Sisters of the Society: The Sisters of the Society of St. Pius X
- Sent.* *Commentary on the Sentences*
- Suppl. Supplement

GENERAL INTRODUCTION





GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Before considering who God is and admiring all that He has done for man, it is important to define what we mean by "interior life."

1.

WHAT IS THE INTERIOR LIFE?

Archbishop Lefebvre takes inspiration for his definition of the spiritual life from Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange. The passages in quotation marks are excerpts from his book, Our Saviour and His Love for Us.

1. A CONVERSATION WITH GOD

The first pages of Garrigou-Lagrange's book on the Savior attempt to give us an understanding of what the interior life is. Every person's secret conversation with his own self Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange calls our "fundamental will"; he uses the expression to mean that state we should be in, of a profound, intimate decision to seek holiness. The term *fundamental* indicates a full, radical, absolute will. We have to be intent on moving forward whatever the cost to ourselves, because as the soul increases in perfection a greater light is brought to shine upon it, and we begin to see all of our imperfections. Our Lord makes us understand little by little what we are going to have to leave behind in order to move ahead.

“The words ‘interior life’ at once call forth a mental picture of a state of relatively profound recollection that may seem inaccessible to most of us who live in the world, engrossed in our affairs from which at times we seek recreation in amusements of one sort or another.

“This commonplace impression contains both truth and error. The interior life, as its name indicates, presupposes a certain recollection in God, but this recollection is not as out of reach as may at first appear.

“Every man, whether good or evil, holds a more or less serious conversation with himself at certain hours of the day whenever he is alone and often enough even amid the throngs of a bustling city...

“The interior life is an elevated form of the interior conversation of every man, when this conversation becomes... a conversation with God...

“When the basic tendencies of a man’s will are directed toward the moral good, the object of virtue, when this man desires the good itself or duty, efficaciously and not merely as a fancy, more than he desires pleasure and what is useful to obtain it, then it can be said of him that he already has an interior life. If such are the basic tendencies of his will, then the interior conversation that he holds with himself in hours of solitude or in crowded streets is a conversation that is directed toward life. In reality this man who genuinely and efficaciously loves the good more than himself is beginning to converse interiorly with God and no longer with himself.”⁸

There is what you might say draws a dividing line among men. I am sure you have had that experience of being in the city in the middle of a whole crowd flowing along, on its way to work, rushing here and there, absorbed in the pursuit of its own advantage, and at some point you must have asked yourself, “Do any of these men know God? Do they have any kind of life with God? Do they have any concern whatsoever for doing the will of God?”⁹

⁸ Fr. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Saviour and His Love for Us (Le Sauveur et Son Amour pour Nous*, 1938), B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis: 1951; reprinted by TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., Rockford, Ill., 1998, pp. 3, 4, 6.

⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

2. ITS ENEMIES: SUPERFICIALITY, SELF-CENTEREDNESS

The reason so many people hesitate to go on retreat is that they are afraid of having that light shed on their soul and being obliged to correct something in themselves. It's a sad thing. So they live a life of superficiality, a life of distraction, a life of noise, to avoid coming face to face with themselves. The voice of God begins to speak the minute we are alone with our conscience. And there are souls who do not want to hear that voice because it is going to tell them something they might be doing wrong... They prefer to live in a state of distraction, in the constant commotion of the world.

As Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange says, "Many persons, without being willing to admit it, love themselves above all else, and more or less consciously make everything converge upon themselves as if they were the center of the universe... Such men do not have an interior life, for their interior conversation with themselves is of death rather than of life. Instead of elevating them, it lowers them... The basic tendency of their will is turned away from the true good, away from the Sovereign Good which is the principle of all the others. What they are really seeking is not truth and the true good of man, of their family, of their children, of their country. On the contrary, they are seeking perpetual pleasure and the money they need to procure it."¹⁰

3. THE INTERIOR LIFE OPEN TO ALL

In His beautiful prayer before the Passion, our Lord said to His Father, "*Now this is everlasting life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ*" (Jn. 17:3). That is the life we should already be living here below.

Suddenly we sense the call of God. So now, yes or no: Do we have the will to answer? We have to go forward. We must not resist the grace that is calling us to know God, to love Him and to serve Him.¹¹

¹⁰ Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Saviour and His Love for Us*, pp. 4-5. Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

¹¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

Contemplation is not reserved to souls specially privileged by God. Contemplation is open to all souls who desire to know God, who want to live in the awareness that God is in them. "If you love Me," says our Lord, "We will come and We will make Our abode in you" (cf. Jn. 14:23). Do you realize that our Lord has come into you, that God has come into you, and that He dwells in you? In a way, that recognition of the presence of God in you and in all things is the very definition of contemplation.¹²

Obviously, we are always more attracted to outward activity than to inward. Inward activity is always the more austere. That is why there is that tendency to activism which Dom Chautard describes so well in his *Soul of the Apostolate*. He has some beautiful lines on the subject, reminding us of the importance of prayer and the interior life with relation to the exterior life.¹³ We must never forget that "it is charity that orders the acts of all other virtues to the last end," as St. Thomas says.¹⁴ That love, that inward disposition of charity, more than anything else, is how we reach our final end. So external actions are not the goal, but rather they are means to those internal actions which are themselves the end, since "the ultimate and principal end of man is the enjoyment of God, according to the Psalmist, 'It is good for me to adhere to God' (Ps. 72:28)."¹⁵ So we can say that by charity, eternal life begins for us already here below.¹⁶

¹² Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1974.

¹³ Dom J.-B. Chautard, O.C.R., *The Soul of the Apostolate (L'Ame de Tout Apostolat)*, 1937), translated by a Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani, Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc., Trappist, KY, 1946, pp. 48 and ff.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 23, a. 8, c., translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros., NY, 1948.

¹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 23, a. 7.

¹⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 6, 1981.

2.

THE CONDITIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. BE A SOUL OF DESIRE

1. *Give oneself entirely*

We need to have certain essential, fundamental dispositions if we are going to obtain that special grace of entering the mystery of Christ: of loving Him and living His life.

We need to be a soul of desire; we need to have a firm will to know our Lord, to love Him, to enter that mystery which is going to include the cross. To the degree that our Lord wills to reveal His own mystery to us, to that degree also does He place the cross on our shoulders. And therefore many souls hesitate to give themselves completely to our Lord because there is a kind of fear of perfection, a fear of holiness.¹⁷

Unfortunately, it happens fairly often in our desire for the spiritual life that we wish there would be some kind of limit, because in the measure that we give ourselves to God, in that measure also does God ask us for an ever greater detachment. It is like a never-ending chain, if you will. Perfection is something very relative. When we truly have the will to give ourselves to God, then God is going to ask us for sacrifices, He starts placing crosses upon us. And gently, gently, He wants to be everything in us.

But we can see it in ourselves as well as we see it in other people, the simple fact that we do not always want God to be everything in us. So our desire is not perfect.

And yet we have to give ourselves completely if we truly want to receive the graces of God that will transform us and give us the fruit of our Lord's Redemption.

St. Teresa says that we have to open our souls to a great confidence: "It is very necessary for us not to contract our desires, but put our trust in God; for, if we do violence to ourselves by little and little, we shall, though not at once, reach that height which

¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

many Saints by His grace have reached. If they had never resolved to desire, and had never by little and little acted upon that resolve, they never could have ascended to so high a state. His Majesty seeks and loves courageous souls; but they must be humble in their ways, and have no confidence in themselves on the road to perfection.”¹⁸ There is the resolution we have to make, if we truly want to open the way to a deep, authentic spiritual life.¹⁹

2. *Desire in St. Benedict*

St. Benedict always had the same requirement for anyone asking to enter the monastery: that he be seeking God. “If truly he seeks God...” And yet, St. Benedict was not trying to establish a particular form of religious life; he was simply trying to make good Christians. Dom Marmion says it in *Christ: The Ideal of the Monk*, when he is explaining the rule of St. Benedict: “When we examine the Rule of St. Benedict, we see very clearly that he presents it only as an abridgement of Christianity, and a means of practicing the Christian Life in its fullness and perfection.” To the mind of St. Benedict, “the Rule is but a simple and very safe guide for leading to God.”²⁰

Because really, as Dom Marmion says, what makes the value of an action? The intention we have in doing it.

What is our intention in our life, in our actions, in our way of being? What are we striving for? That is everything.²¹

3. *Desire in St. Thomas Aquinas*

How does St. Thomas answer that very first question: Why was man created? What is man? He answers: One who is destined for God.²² So our intention always has to be that striving for God.

St. Thomas has some very beautiful lines about desire: “The intellect which has more of the light of glory will see God the

¹⁸ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, translated by David Lewis, Benziger Brothers, NY, 1904, ch. 13, §2-3, p. 187.

¹⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

²⁰ Dom Marmion, *Christ: The Ideal of the Monk*, (*Christ, Idéal du Moine*, 1922), translated by a Nun of Tyburn Convent, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis: 1926, p. 1.

²¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 26, 1982.

²² *Summa Theologica* I^a, q. 1, a. 1, c.

more perfectly; and he will have a fuller participation of the light of glory who has more charity; because where there is the greater charity, there is the more desire; and desire in a certain degree makes the one desiring apt and prepared to receive the object desired."²³

That is a little bit what St. Paul meant when he said, "*open wide your hearts*" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:11-13). If we want the heart to be receptive, it has to be open. Desire is what opens the heart to God.²⁴

4. *Desire in the liturgy*

Holy Scripture often speaks to us of this desire to progress, this desire of union with God. "*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 shalt thou find the knowledge of God*" (Prov. 2:3-5). "*Seek ye the Lord: seek His face evermore*" (Ps. 104:4). The words *quaerere Deum* express this desire of the holy soul seeking after God.²⁵

At Prime,²⁶ 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 speaks that way 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, 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

²³ *Summa Theologica* I^a, q. 12, a. 6, c.

²⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, Jan. 26, 1982.

²⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 26, 1982, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 224-225.

²⁶ Part of the Divine Office recited after Lauds as a morning prayer.

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 prove that statement false by constantly seeking God ourselves.²⁷

2. LOVE SILENCE AND THE HIDDEN LIFE

It is not in the middle of noise, in the middle of chaos, that you are going to find God. You have to read *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* to realize the importance of that seeking of our Lord. "Seek a suitable time for leisure and meditate often on the favors of God." This is from chapter 20 in *The Imitation of Christ*, in the first book.²⁸

"Leave curiosity alone. Read such matters as bring sorrow to the heart rather than occupation to the mind" – meaning, things that only pass the time. "If you withdraw yourself from unnecessary talking and idle running about, from listening to gossip and rumors, you will find enough time that is suitable for holy meditation... To stay at home is easier than to be sufficiently on guard while away. Anyone, then, who aims to live the inner and spiritual life must go apart, with Jesus, from the crowd." So you see, he has these little proverbs that our experience is always confirming. They are extremely valuable.

"What great peace and tranquility would be his, if he cut himself off from all empty care and thought only of things divine, things helpful to his soul, and put all his trust in God. No man deserves the consolation of heaven unless he persistently arouses himself to holy compunction.²⁹ If you desire true sorrow of heart, seek the privacy of your cell and shut out the uproar of the world, as it is written: 'In your chamber bewail your sins.' There you will find what too often you lose abroad. Your cell" – or your room –

²⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society of Saint Pius X, Saint-Michel en Brenne, September 1984, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 225.

²⁸ *The Imitation of Christ*, book I, ch. 20, §1-5; from translations by A. Croft and H. Bolton, The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1940, and by Richard Whitford, ed. Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., Image Books, NY, 1955.

²⁹ See the glossary at the end of this book.

“will become dear to you if you remain in it, but if you do not, it will become wearisome.”

If a person loves his cell, little by little it will become sweet to him, it will become pleasant, because it will become a means of union with God. On the contrary, if a person is always itching to leave his cell, then eventually he will not be able to stand being there.

Instead, little by little, you have to learn to love your cell, so you can know our Lord better and so you can live with Him. You are not just trying to be alone so no one bothers you. That’s not the point. You are trying to live in company with our Lord, under His gaze.³⁰

3. ANSWER THE CALL OF GOD

We will never have a truly deep understanding of the mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ until we have given ourselves completely, entirely, without even a thought for what trials it may bring, for what crosses God may place on our shoulders.

Certainly, even the saints, for all their holiness, never reached the degree of understanding of the mystery of our Lord which the Blessed Virgin Mary must have had, or even St. Joseph. And our Lord in His human soul had a knowledge of Himself far superior to theirs.

So it’s not about trying to reach a full and perfect understanding of the mystery of our Lord. It’s about reaching the degree of understanding and of holiness which our Lord wants us to attain. St. Paul says it explicitly in his Epistle to the Ephesians, “*Our Lord chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy*” (Eph. 1:4). Therefore God wants us to become saints. Our Lord calls to us and we have to answer. Our entire spiritual life is going to depend on that answer.³¹

³⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1974.

³¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

3.

THE FRUITS OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

*Jesus Christ gives peace and stability to generous souls
who have a profound spiritual life.*

One of the hallmarks of the spiritual life in our time is instability. Souls are always going through highs and lows, through moments of euphoria, zeal, enthusiasm, and then all of a sudden they enter a kind of depression, a kind of discouragement, a kind of disgust, even despair. Certainly, all of the saints knew something of that, but still, they had an underlying stability which never would have allowed them to abandon God, to abandon our Lord. They had times of spiritual consolation and times of desolation, but all that was insignificant, they were like little waves on the surface, but the underlying depths were immovable. They had an attachment to God, to our Lord, to souls, to the life of the Church, to the development of the Mystical Body of our Lord, of the reign of our Lord, which was unassailable, and which meant that in trial and difficulty they held strong. They had a stability about them, a serenity.

You are going to have to acquire that permanence in the spiritual life, and learn not to be completely destabilized by some comment which your friend makes, for example. Someone was rude to you, or else someone forgot about you; you were left in a corner; someone made an unpleasant remark. What a pity to let yourself be thrown off balance by so little.

You have to tell yourself: "I will have difficulties, trials, difficult moments, but I will hold strong." Once we have attached ourselves to our Lord, trials and temptations may come, we may sin, we may fall, and so on. But then we cling to the solid rock which is our Lord Jesus Christ, we cling to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, and then we just forge ahead, telling ourselves: "It is going to work out, it has to work out."³²

³² Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 5, 1974.

It is my hope that during your life 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.³³

³³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 48.

Book One

GOD AND HIS LOVE FOR US





The Most Holy Trinity

I

THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD

The only possible attitude for contemplation is one of objectivity. The object of contemplation is God, His attributes, and above all the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and of the redemptive Incarnation.

The first subject of study in the *Summa Theologica* is God.¹ That is also the first subject of the prayer of our Lord: “*Our Father who art in heaven.*” It is the first affirmation of our *Credo*: “I believe in God...” It is the First Commandment: “You shall worship one God.” The first good of man, and the last, his origin and his end, his happiness every day and for all eternity, is God.

So how can there be such blindness in the knowledge and the love of God, even in many baptized Catholics?

The situation is really tragic. Does it leave us indifferent? But that reality of the ignorance of God is overwhelming for us to imagine. What is there we could possibly do? All of modern society pushes to that ignorance. But even in ourselves, is there not still too much ignorance of God? Do we make an effort to meditate on God, to consider more closely that boundless mystery, “the alpha and the omega,” the *principium et finis* of the mystery of love expressed in the Word Incarnate?

I am not talking about making a theological study; I am talking about coming just a little closer to the immense reality which is God, and then falling down in adoration, in humility, in burning oblation before His attributes and His infinite perfections, in imitation of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.²

¹ *Summa Theologica* I^a, q. 2-43.

² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 15-17; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 1, 2.

1.

WHO IS GOD?

God is the author of nature. As such, it is possible for reason alone to discover Him (Rom. 1:19-21). Thus did the pagans come to realize His existence. St. Thomas Aquinas confirmed this approach by showing that we may discover God by five ways.³ Pagan philosophers had even reasoned to several divine attributes, the most fundamental of which is the fact that God exists of Himself, which the philosophers call aseity. Archbishop Lefebvre was particularly struck by this attribute because of its consequences for the spiritual life.

St. Thomas does not hesitate to bring us into the most elevated subjects, the most profound for us and at the same time closest to our heart: God Himself.

He deploys all of the possibilities of theology and even philosophy to try to give us the clearest idea possible of the perfections of God.⁴

1. INVITATION TO MEDITATION

Imagine the fact that what is spiritual is infinitely more alive, more real, than what is material. The material world came from the spiritual world. Therefore it is the spiritual world which is, and which will be, the definitive reality. God is spirit (*Jn. 4:24*) and so we cannot see Him, and yet He is infinitely more rich in reality than any creature.⁵

Although God is infinitely above us, we can still try to meditate on what those authors who teach the knowledge of God have had to say about Him. This contemplation will be our happiness in heaven, so we can perhaps increase our happiness a little here on earth by knowing God better. Fr. Lessius, a Jesuit and professor

³ *Summa Theologica* I^a, q. 2.

⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1989.

⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

at Louvain at the beginning of the seventeenth century, wrote a book on the Divine Names. He has some very beautiful considerations on the perfections of God. He says, "The reason why the knowledge of God is the rule of virtue is evident. The perfection of man consists in union with God, his first beginning and his last end. Now this union originates in knowledge. It is the foundation of all union with God... The first union with God begins by intelligence. From that follows the union of heart by hope and charity... The blessed inhabitants of heaven know no other law... All their affections and all their movements are formed after the sole and perfect rule of the knowledge of God... From that rule emanate as from their source all the teachings and examples of the saints."⁶ This is a very precious little book that helps us to raise ourselves to God and better understand who God is.⁷

So we should not be afraid to meditate on the perfections of God and on the reality which God is. Let us try to live in ever greater union with Him. Let us ask Him for the understanding of what He is in order to enter more fully into His plan – that plan which is traced in the *Summa Theologica* and which permits us to correspond to what His Providence wills. We need to feel that we are in the hands of God, from the instant He gave us a soul until the moment we come to dwell in Him definitively.⁸

A little more understanding of God's infinity and of His infinite charity and mercy ought to move us deeper in the love of God, draw us away from sin and confirm us in virtue; it is the path which all of the saints have followed, under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus.⁹

2. GOD CANNOT BE NAMED

We need to remember during this entire contemplation of God that everything we say of God has to be applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God. We cannot separate Jesus Christ from God.

⁶ Fr. Leonard Lessius (1554-1623), *The Names of God and Meditative Summaries of the Divine Perfections (De Divinis Nominibus)*, translated by T.J. Campbell, S.J., The America Press, NY, 1912, p. 141.

⁷ Retreat, Morgon, October 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 128-129.

⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1989.

⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*. p. 17 ; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 3.

One way toward a greater knowledge of God is to deny that He could have any of the limitations proper to creatures (those creatures which under a different light help to prove the existence of God). We thereby deny any imperfection in God: God is perfect. We deny any limitation: He is infinite. We deny any limit in space: He is everywhere, omnipresent. We deny any limit in time: He is eternal. We deny any change: He is immutable.¹⁰

God is both unnameable and all-nameable; that is to say, there is no name which perfectly expresses what He is, and yet He must be given all of the names which signify something positive, beautiful, great, or infinite. Unnameable is the most appropriate of all the names, because it places Him instantly beyond all human expression. God is unnameable because a name would reduce Him; it would set limits to Him, whereas God has no limits. God cannot be grasped by our intellect. We know Him here below by grace, and we shall know Him in Heaven by the light of glory, but our knowledge will even then remain imperfect. We shall not fully know the divine essence, or else we would be God. St. Justin says, "These words Father, and God, and Creator, and Lord... are not names, but appellations derived from His good deeds and functions."¹¹ Let us piously avow our ignorance rather than proudly boast our knowledge. Only the Persons of the Trinity can know God perfectly and infinitely. As for us, we shall always be created beings, even with the light of glory by which we shall resemble God in a certain manner; but we shall never be God. And our happiness will be to find ourselves face to face with the infinite.¹²

3. "I AM WHO AM"

How does one speak of the unnameable? We have seen that *unnameable* is the most fitting name for God. If we want to give Him another name, we have to look to the Scriptures. There is a passage in Exodus where God tells Moses His name: "*Moses said to God: 'Lo, I shall go to the children of Israel, and say to them: "The God of your fathers hath sent me to you." If they should say to me: "What is His*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 6, 7.

¹¹ St. Justin Martyr, *Apology*, II, §6, translated from the Greek by Philip Schaff, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, reprinted by Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 2001, p. 298.

¹² Retreat, Morgon, October 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 128.

name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses: 'I am who am.' He said: "Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: "He who is, hath sent me to you"" (Ex. 3:13-14). So God Himself has given us His name: *He who is*. That's all the explanation we get. It is as simple as could be. *God is*. And why didn't God add something to the verb *to be*? Precisely because anything that was added would have placed a limit on Him, whereas *He who is* possesses all being. St. Thomas says about this name, *He who is*, that "among other names this one specially denominates God." God's being is His essence, and so that name really is His proper name. Secondly, this name is the most adequate by its universality. All the other divine names present a less general signification. And thirdly, *He who is* signifies not only being, but being whose existence has neither past nor future.¹³

Let us ponder for just two seconds: "I possess all being in Me, by My own nature, *ens a se*: being from oneself, and not *ab alio*, from another."

A person could meditate on that for hours. To have being from one's own self is to be eternal. He who has being from Himself has always been; He is always; He will always be.¹⁴

It is extraordinary that God should have defined Himself by these words, which are not just a description of God, but the most profound description of God that anyone has ever formulated. The most explicit, the most profound, that St. Thomas ever expressed, and all the philosophers, here in such a simple manner, so clear. God is all being. He is Being.¹⁵

God has existed forever. Our Lord says it more than once: "And now do Thou, Father, glorify Me with Thyself, with the glory that I had with Thee before the world existed" (Jn. 17:5). "Before Abraham came to be, I am" (Jn. 8:58). God cannot define Himself otherwise than as *He who is*, who exists, who has always existed and who possesses all that being can contain. All of the qualities of being

¹³ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 13, a. 11, c. Retreat, Morgon, October 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 129.

¹⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974.

¹⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 29, 1980. God is not identical to all beings, which is the error of pantheism, but he is Being itself without limit, without the limitations which we see even in the most perfect creatures. A creature does not exist by itself but receives its being from God.

can be ascribed to God. God is infinite; He is good; He is almighty; He is eternal.¹⁶

If God *is*, then necessarily He is all being, He is truth, He is the good, He is the beautiful, because all of these qualities are attached to being itself.¹⁷

He who exists by someone else had a beginning, at a given moment. He does not have being from himself, so he must receive it from another. I entered into being, but God never entered into being – He always *is*. So you see the difference.¹⁸

God is *ens a se*, being from Himself; all other beings are *ab alio*, do not have the cause of their being in themselves. These simple affirmations are an inexhaustible source of meditation and sanctification. Whether it be this gaze upon God, losing itself in His infinity, or the consideration of the creature's relation to the Creator, or the sight of the nothingness of the creature, we are face to face with what is most true, most profound and most mysterious in God and in ourselves.¹⁹

4. MAN: A DEPENDENT BEING

1. *Dependence in the natural order*

All we have to do now is look a little deeper into these ideas. What is a being which is entirely from another? And what is a being which is entirely from itself? It is the difference between nothing and everything.

He who is from Himself is everything, because He has in Himself all of the resources of being. Nothing escapes Him. Everything belongs to Him. Outside of God, there can be no beings which are not from another, that is, from God. We are from someone else, so we have nothing from ourselves. Everything in us belongs to God. Even our soul, our body, all that we have... all that is from another, only. That other is God. So you see what attitude

¹⁶ Retreat, Morgon, October 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 130.

¹⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 6th conference.

¹⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974.

¹⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 19; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 5. The infinity of God is one of simplicity and not of extension.

we need to have before God. Before our parents, before great benefactors, we already have an attitude of respect, of reverence, of gratitude, of thanksgiving. But what is all that compared to God?²⁰

That is why it is important to study a sound philosophy, and to see what insignificant beings we really are. When we consider that every angel is a species, whereas all men together make up a single species!²¹

We, human beings, differ among ourselves as individuals of a single species. Our souls are distinct from one another because they are united to a body of a single species, namely the human race. By contrast, angels are of a purely spiritual nature; there are as many species as there are angels. Imagine the myriads of angels which are in Heaven! Each one of them forms a species of its own.²²

That billions of men should form only a single species indicates to us our littleness. All of that should make us realize the nothing which we are before God.

We cannot move our little finger, we cannot do anything, a hair cannot fall from our head without God permitting it, since He upholds everything in being. If from one instant to the next God decided to be rid of us, we would vanish into nothingness. We would no longer be.

All men, be they Moslem, be they Buddhist... are held in being by God, by His great mercy. All of these things philosophy can teach us.²³

So our position is false, mistaken, illusory, if we are not standing truly before God as His creatures. In his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul has a very brief expression, very concise, but profound: *"If someone imagines that he is something, whereas he is nothing, he is mistaken"* (Gal. 6:3). We have to realize that there are millions, billions of men who are constantly mistaken. And we, too, are mistaken when we imagine that we are anything and are

²⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

²¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974.

²² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 5th conference.

²³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974.

worth anything of ourselves, without God. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, *“What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?”* (1 Cor. 4:7)²⁴

2. *Constantly in the hand of God*

In any case, God is holding us. Men believe that they can do without Him, but they are in a state of complete illusion. God is in us, He gives us existence, He gives us the means of living. Psalm 138 expresses it admirably: *“Lord, I lie open to Thy scrutiny; Thou knowest me, knowest when I sit down and when I rise up again, canst read my thoughts from far away. Walk I or sleep I, Thou canst tell; no movement of mine but Thou art watching it. Before ever the words are framed on my lips, all my thought is known to Thee; rearguard and vanguard, Thou dost compass me about, Thy hand still laid upon me. Such wisdom as Thine is far beyond my reach, no thought of mine can attain it. Where can I go, then, to take refuge from Thy spirit, to hide from Thy view? If I should climb up to heaven, Thou art there; if I sink down to the world beneath, Thou art present still. If I could wing my way eastwards, or find a dwelling beyond the western sea, still would I find Thee beckoning to me, Thy right hand upholding me. Or perhaps I would think to bury myself in darkness; night should surround me, friendlier than day; but no, darkness is no hiding-place from Thee, with Thee the night shines clear as day itself... Author, Thou, of my inmost being, didst Thou not form me in my mother’s womb? I praise Thee for my wondrous fashioning, for all the wonders of Thy creation... This mortal frame had no mysteries for Thee, who didst contrive it in secret... All are set down already in Thy record; my days were numbered before ever they came to be.”* That is God speaking. Whatever we do, wherever we go, whatever we think – God is there. He understands all things, He knows all things, He is carrying us.²⁵

We can neither think, nor want, nor desire, nor do anything at all without God – even sinners cannot. No creature, no being, no angel, no elect in Heaven, no animal here on earth, no creature can act, none can move, none can develop, in any way whatsoever, without God – not even the tiniest insect.²⁶

²⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

²⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

²⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

3. *One consequence of the dependence of all men on God: true fraternity*

We are dependent on God, we receive being from God, as do all of the material and spiritual creatures that surround us. No man can say he comes from another principle than from God. Consequently, by the very fact, all of us are brothers. That fraternity, true fraternity, comes to us from our origin, that is, from the Word, and so from God.²⁷

4. *Dependence in the supernatural order*

To these natural truths within the reach of philosophy we now add those of the faith, to show that man is a radically dependent being.

The faith teaches me that I am a sinner, that I have a sickness. Even after the grace of baptism, I am still gravely ill. I am blind; I am tempted not to render to God and to neighbor what is due to them; I am weak; I am tempted to love things here below in a disordered manner: these are the four great illnesses which St. Thomas points out to us and which make up that *fomes peccati*, that kindling-source of sin, that inclination to sin which we still have in us even after the grace of baptism.²⁸

We must never forget it. We have constant need of a doctor, need to be redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The hour of Redemption has not ended for us; it is still underway.

Finally, the faith teaches us that we can do nothing which is meritorious without the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what St. Paul is saying when he talks about that charity which is simply the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: "*If I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:3). No action earns us Heaven if we do not have in us the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁹

5. *Forgetfulness of God*

When we think of how dependent man is upon God, and that

²⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 29, 1980.

²⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 85, a. 3.

²⁹ Spiritual conference, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

still there are men who live as though God did not exist... Yet they are being carried by Him all the time, at every instant of their life. From their first breath to their last, they are being carried by God. They cannot breathe without God giving them the power to do so, through His being, since all being comes from Him. That these men should live their whole life without even thinking of Him who is giving them everything they have and everything they are able to do – it is unbelievable. Man is so centered around himself, so thinking only of himself, that he believes and he imagines that he is giving himself existence and that everything belongs to him. Yet, every day, we can see very well that we do not belong to ourselves. People die, they disappear; they do not have being from themselves, or else they would not die.³⁰

That is what all the wisdom of philosophy and theology teaches us about our true state: on the one hand, the wisdom of philosophy teaches us that we are nothing, and that we depend entirely on God; and on the other hand, theology teaches us that we are sinners, that Jesus came to redeem us, that He shed His blood on the cross, and that, without Him, we can do nothing worthy of Heaven.

So we are truly in a state of dependence: dependence for our existence, dependence for our salvation.³¹

6. *The perception of God at the moment of death*

It seems to me that our stupefaction when we die is really going to come from that discovery of the place God holds. Here, we don't see it, we don't realize. There, we are going to realize that nothing, nothing, nothing, exists without God; nothing. Therefore, creatures are nothing in comparison to God, absolutely nothing. It is God who gives us everything we are.

So, instead of knowing God *in ænigmate* as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 13:12), we will know Him by vision. Today, there is a veil keeping us from seeing God, but that veil is going to be torn away; and at that instant we will have that incredible vision of God! The almightiness of God is going to appear to us in a manner beyond our imagining.³²

³⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

³¹ Spiritual conference, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

³² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

Nonetheless, we have to do all we can here below to decrease the astonishment that must be ours on the day God calls us to Himself. Instead of living in illusion until the hour of our death, why not strive already to live in the truth? Let us try to bridge the gap a little bit between the truth which we are going to discover and the way in which we think of things now, so that we might exist a little bit more in reality and not live in a kind of illusion.³³

5. THE FRUITS OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD

A Catholic is someone who affirms his total, complete, continual dependence on God: whence his humility, his adoration, his profound reverence toward God, and his gratitude to God.³⁴

One of the happy consequences of this meditation should be that our pride gets smaller and disappears before that greatness, before that immensity, before that *everything* which is God.³⁵

Little by little as we come to know Him, we are constantly growing humbler before that immensity, before that perfection, before that greatness of God. As we become more aware, our soul is being gradually engulfed in the adoration of God, of that Being who is so beyond us, who is so above us.³⁶

Humility does impel us to reverence for God. "I adore You": that truly is the essential attitude of every normal soul, placing himself in thought before his Creator – and all the more so before his Redeemer, his Sanctifier.³⁷

The minute we realize that God is the cause of everything that exists, it leads us not just to respect Him but to fall in constant adoration before Him; and it gives us a greater and greater love for Him because we say to ourselves, "How is it possible that God is with us, little creatures of nothing at all? That He lives in us;

³³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 2nd conference.

³⁴ Retreat, Morgon, October, 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 130.

³⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 7th conference.

³⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 2nd conference.

³⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 7th conference.

that He gives us His grace, His sacraments; that He gives us Himself in Holy Communion? How is it possible? He is so far above us, and yet He takes care of us as though He had nothing to care for in the world but us." We are so dumbfounded at thinking that He who is so great, so beautiful and so perfect should take care of us in that way, that we cannot do otherwise than render Him love for love.³⁸

2.

THE REVELATION OF THE TRINITARIAN MYSTERY

By faith, man enters a much deeper understanding of God than by natural reason alone. Man comes to know God in His inner life.

After the marvels of infinite grandeur of the divine Being, but considered statically as it were, let us try to enter the meditation and contemplation of God in His dynamism, in His life, in His operations, both inward and outward. We are stepping into a marvelous universe, like Moses coming up to the burning bush. Let us purify our hearts and our souls to ask the Spirit of God for a ray of light, like the light of glory which we are going to have in Heaven; to discover a little bit of that burning light which is the divine light.³⁹

1. THE ESSENTIAL DOGMA OF THE FAITH

We learn by the *Credo*, which the Church puts on our lips, that there are three Persons in God, that God is Trinity. That is something which our reason could not have discovered;⁴⁰ it really is a revealed truth, taught to us by the Church. We therefore know by the authority of the Church, echoing the affirmations of our

³⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 6th conference.

³⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 25; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 32, a. 1.

Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Messiah, that there are three Persons in God: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. God is one, in three Persons.⁴¹

It is good to remind ourselves of the intimate life of the Holy Trinity, which is the essential dogma of our faith. We cannot be Catholic, we cannot be Christian, if we do not have faith in the Holy Trinity. Obviously the Trinitarian life is for us an absolutely unfathomable, incomprehensible mystery. But we can still try to have some idea of the intimate life of God based on what our Lord Himself has revealed to us. The fact that we believe that our Lord is the Son of God and that He is one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, consubstantially united to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, gives our Lord Jesus Christ His full dimension.⁴²

2. THE TRINITARIAN LIFE

1. *The teaching of Jesus Christ*

1. The Father and the Son

Our Lord has already shed light for us, as much as He could, to enlighten our poor little intellects. It was shortly before His Passion, after the Last Supper, when He was still with the Apostles. There is a moment which is very moving. Philip said to our Lord, “*Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us.*” And Jesus answered, “*Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me? Philip, he who sees Me sees also the Father. How canst thou say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Dost thou not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?*” (Jn. 14:8-10) Those are very important words because they express what the Holy Trinity is, as far as it can be expressed here below: the Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father.⁴³ There is a distinction, but at the same time a unity. So those who were seeing our Lord were also seeing the Father and, ultimately, they were seeing the Trinity. The Persons of the Trinity can never be separated.

“Dost thou not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you, I speak not on My own authority.

⁴¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 8th conference.

⁴² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 17, 1978.

⁴³ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 42, a. 5.

But the Father who dwells in Me, it is He who does the works. Believe on My word that I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (cf. Jn. 14:10-11). There, our Lord is affirming the distinction among the divine Persons and at the same time Their unity. That is the important thing to grasp about the Holy Trinity. We must not believe that there are three gods. There is only one God, in three Persons. Over the course of His life, our Lord spoke very much about His Father – St. John expresses it more clearly perhaps than the other Evangelists. Our Lord is constantly making reference to the Father. So we cannot doubt that there is a distinction between the Father and the Son.⁴⁴

2. The Holy Spirit

Our Lord spoke less of the Holy Spirit directly. He did speak of Him very clearly, though. The Gospel on the other hand speaks very frequently of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of our Lord’s life, the action of the Holy Spirit is constantly coming through. It is the Holy Spirit who leads the old man Simeon to the Temple, for example. There are many references to the action of the Holy Spirit around the birth of our Lord and during the first events of His infancy. But then our Lord Himself speaks of Him after that, in a very explicit way. Jesus says to Jude (not Judas Iscariot), *“If anyone love Me, He will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you have heard is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while yet dwelling with you. But the Consoler, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name...” (Jn. 14:23-26)*

There we discover another detail about the relations among the Persons of the Trinity. In fact, when we read this passage, we see that the relation of the Son with the Father is a unique relation, whereas for the Holy Spirit both the Father and the Son are mentioned. That is why the Church teaches us that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son, as opposed to only from the Father or only from the Son.⁴⁵

So at the end of His life our Lord was already unveiling the

⁴⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 8th conference.

⁴⁵ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 36, a. 2. Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 8th conference.

mystery of the Trinity to the Apostles, but only at Pentecost did they really begin to understand. He made them realize things which the Old Testament had not yet known in that way. There were many signs of the Trinity before our Lord came to earth, but we could not say that men had a clear notion of the Holy Trinity. Only at our Lord's coming was this mystery revealed. Because our Lord is a Son, we learned that there also exists the Father, and then the Holy Spirit by whom our Lord is animated. In that way our Lord was unveiling this great mystery to the Apostles, and to all of His disciples.⁴⁶

2. *The teaching of St. John*

1. The unity in the Trinity

St. John also makes an affirmation about the mystery of the Holy Trinity in his first Epistle:

"Who is there that overcomes the world if not he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?... For there are three that bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:5, 7). The unity in the Trinity could not be more clearly expressed. "For there are three that bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."⁴⁷ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, and the water, and the blood... If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God which is greater, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony of God in himself. He who does not believe God makes Him a liar; because he does not believe the witness that God has borne concerning His Son." (1 John 5:7-10)⁴⁸

This letter of St. John is very important because it shows the essential connection between our Lord Jesus Christ and His Father. It is of capital importance, especially today, when people are denying the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. They may not always deny it formally, but they deny it practically. St. John says it very clearly, *"No one who disowns the Son has the Father"* (1 John

⁴⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 9th conference.

⁴⁷ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 39, a. 2.

⁴⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 8th conference.

2:23). It's not possible. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). St. John is always making that connection between the Son of God and God the Father Himself because, as our Lord had already said, "He who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent Him" (Jn. 5:23).

2. Anti-Trinitarian Islam

We cannot say that the Moslems adore the same God as we do, for example. They refuse our Lord Jesus Christ. They say that we are idolaters because, according to them, we adore a man. They say that idolaters have to be killed. In reality, we adore our Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, God Himself. So we cannot say that the Moslems adore the same God as we do, because they reject our Lord. It's not possible. It is very important to re-read the Epistles of St. John to know what our Catholic faith is. The Father is in our Lord and He is in the Father; we cannot separate Them and say, "Oh! Well, I reject the Son, but I'll take the Father." No, it's not possible. In Heaven, there will no separating of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. People will not be able to choose, saying, "I choose the Holy Spirit; I choose the Father; I choose the Son." No, there is no getting around it, the three are bound together, indissolubly, from eternity and for ever.⁴⁹

3. *The teaching of the catechism*

1. One God in three Persons

The little summary which is given by the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* gives us a quick idea of what the faith teaches us about this mystery. In the section on the Apostles' Creed, it says the following: "In the one Substance of the Divinity the Father is the First Person, who with His Only begotten Son, and the Holy Ghost, is one God and one Lord."⁵⁰

That is why we can say in all truth that we have only one God: our Lord Jesus Christ. There are three Persons in God, but we have only one God: "You alone are Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ."⁵¹ That is exactly what St. Paul says, too,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, translated by John A. McHugh, O.P., and Charles J. Callan, O.P., (1923), reprinted by Roman Catholic Books, Fort Collins, CO, and by TAN Books and Publishers, Rockford, Ill., 1982, p. 22.

⁵¹ *Gloria of the Mass.*

that we have “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). We have only one Lord because we have only one God: our Lord Jesus Christ. This God is in three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Those are very consoling truths for us because when we receive our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion, we receive God, we receive the three Persons. Our Lord cannot be separated from the other two Persons. He is the Son of God, consubstantially and essentially united to the others, and therefore He is absolutely inseparable from the others.⁵²

2. Three equal Persons

All that makes three infinite Persons, who have the same greatness, the same power, the same perfection. Because if the Father in engendering the Son did not give everything to His Son, the Son would be a creature, by the very fact. Since He would not be perfect, He would not be God. If He is God, He is infinitely perfect, infinitely good, infinitely great, exactly like the Father.⁵³

Indeed, as the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* says, “It would be impiety to assert that these three Persons are unlike or unequal in any thing....⁵⁴ Hence, when we say that the Father is the First Person, we are not to be understood to mean that in the Trinity there is anything first or last, greater or less. Let none of the faithful be guilty of such impiety, for the Christian religion proclaims the same eternity, the same majesty of glory in the Three Persons. But since the Father is the Beginning without a beginning, we truly and unhesitatingly affirm that He is the First Person.”⁵⁵

Of course, when we say first Person, right away we have the impression that the Father existed first, then there was the Son, then the Holy Spirit. But there was never an instant, even the thousandth of a second, when the Father existed without the Son and the Holy Spirit. They have always existed consubstantially. They are eternal. God *is*.⁵⁶

⁵² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 17, 1978.

⁵³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 9th conference.

⁵⁴ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 42.

⁵⁵ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 17, 1978.

3. Three distinct Persons

“This name of Father,” continues the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, “implies that in the one Essence of the Godhead is proposed to our belief, not only one Person, but a distinction of persons; for in one Divine Nature there are Three Persons – the Father, begotten of none; the Son, begotten of the Father before all ages; the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, likewise, from all eternity.”⁵⁷

The only distinction to be found in the Trinity is in those relations between the Persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ It is the only manner of distinguishing the Persons. For Them to be God, They have to have exactly the same perfection, the same power, the same infinity. It is a tremendous mystery.⁵⁹

4. Man: A reflection of the Trinity

God said, “*Let Us make man in Our image*” (*Gen. 1:26*), so there has to be a certain image of God in us.⁶⁰ There are three elements in our soul. There is the soul itself, the intellect and the will. The soul represents the Father in a way, the intellect represents the Word,⁶¹ that is to say, the Son, and the will represents the Holy Spirit, who is love. The intellect is the light, the light of the mind, the intellectual light, the light of glory which is God. The Holy Spirit more represents charity.⁶²

So let us thank God for having given us this revelation that fills us with joy. We hope that with the grace of God we shall one day contemplate this great mystery of the Trinity, to sing the praises of God and taste the happiness of Heaven.⁶³

⁵⁷ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 21. Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 17, 1978.

⁵⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 28.

⁵⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 9th conference.

⁶⁰ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 93, a. 1, 5.

⁶¹ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 34, a. 2.

⁶² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 9th conference.

⁶³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 8th conference.

3. CHARITY IN GOD

1. *The gift of self*

We have said that God is Being, that God is Holy Trinity. Has God provided another definition of Himself in Holy Scripture? Yes, there is still another definition, which may help us grasp a little better the great mystery of the Holy Trinity. Oh, certainly, our idea is still going to be vague; it is not going to come anywhere near the great light which we will have by the vision of God in Heaven. Here below the Trinity is and remains a great mystery. What does St. John say in his Epistle? *Deus caritas est, "God is charity"* (1 John 4:8). It is another definition of God.

What is love? How can we define it? St. Thomas says that *caritas est diffusiva sui*, that is to say that charity gives itself, spreads itself. It is the gift of self. So if we apply that notion to the Trinity, you see that charity really can, to a certain extent, give us some light on those relations among the three Persons. The Father so loves the Son that He gives Himself to Him, and He gives Himself in such a way that the Son is His equal.⁶⁴ He keeps nothing for Himself, so to speak. He stays what He is, of course; He always stays God; He always keeps all of His perfections. But in His infinite love for His Son, He engenders a Son exactly like Himself, who has all of His properties with the same infinity, the same perfection, the same eternity, because love exists to give itself, and the Father therefore gives Himself in His Son.⁶⁵

Imagine, then, what must be the charity of the Father for the Son. He has kept nothing for Himself even though He could have said, "Yes, I am willing to engender My Son, but there is still something I would like to keep for Myself as Father." He did not keep anything for Himself, because the Son is equal to Him.⁶⁶

And the Son and the Father, giving Themselves to each other, produce the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is likewise equal to the Father and to the Son. It is the gift of Themselves which constitutes the third Person, who is the Holy Spirit. This circuminses-

⁶⁴ God communicates Himself entirely in engendering His Son. We find there something like an act of charity, by which the one loving gives himself to the beloved, but we say so only by a certain analogy.

⁶⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 9th conference.

⁶⁶ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 18, 1978, 3rd conference.

sion of all the substance of the Father which passes to the Son, and from the Son to the Holy Spirit, constitutes that immense charity which is the model for all creatures.⁶⁷

2. *The Trinity: Object of stupefaction*

Nothing can be explained, nothing can be understood, nothing can subsist without the Holy Trinity, inexhaustible and eternal wellspring of charity inside the Trinity and outside the Trinity.

“The Father is charity, the Son is grace, the Holy Spirit is communion, O blessed Trinity!”⁶⁸

“From Him [the Father] are all things, through Him [the Son] are all things, in Him [the Holy Spirit] are all things, to Him [God Trinity] be all glory for the ages.”⁶⁹

“Already the ruddy sun departs, You, eternal Light, Unity in Your blessed Trinity, fill our hearts with charity.”⁷⁰

How encouraging and comforting is this meditation on the Charity-Trinity and the Trinity-Charity, and what a source of unity!⁷¹

Let us thank God who has made known to us all of His greatness, and let us realize the importance of believing in this great mystery of the Holy Trinity. It is destined to be our joy for all eternity. Certainly in Heaven we will have an immense gratitude for what God has done for us, for His Incarnation, for His Redemption, for His sacrifice of the cross; but all of those things will be part of the past. At the end of time, the choice will have been made between the elect and those who are not, but the great mystery of the Trinity will remain. It will be like new horizons constantly opening before us. We know the substance of it by the faith. By the faith, we believe in the Holy Trinity; but in Heaven we are not going to be believing It anymore; we are going to be seeing It. That is going to be the cause our eternal happiness. As St. Paul says, here below we can form no notion of what that bliss

⁶⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

⁶⁸ *Caritas Pater est, gratia Filius, communicatio Spiritus Sanctus, o beata Trinitas!* (1st antiphon from the 3rd nocturn of the feast of the Trinity).

⁶⁹ *Ex quo omnia, per quem omnia, in quo omnia, ipsi gloria in sæcula* (5th antiphon of Vespers of the feast of the Holy Trinity).

⁷⁰ Hymn from Vespers of the Trinity.

⁷¹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 26; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 10.

of eternal glory is going to be (1 Cor. 2:9). It is so much higher than what we think, higher than what we can possibly envision, that we are obviously going to be stupefied at seeing all of God's attributes, all of His magnificence.⁷²

⁷² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 9th conference.

II

THE INCARNATE WORD

Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is at once the goal toward which we must be tending and the path which brings us there: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn. 14:6). He is the perfect model offered for our imitation. In saving us by His cross, He teaches us to follow Him by carrying our own cross with love.

1.

THE STUDY OF THE INCARNATE WORD: THE MOST USEFUL OF ALL SCIENCES

Now we are going to try to consider more closely that eternal Wisdom who willed to take a body like our own. St. Grignion de Montfort tells us about Him,

"Can we love someone we do not even know? Can we love deeply someone we know only vaguely?

"Why is Jesus, the adorable, eternal and incarnate Wisdom loved so little if not because He is either too little known or not known at all?

"Hardly anyone studies the supreme science of Jesus, as did St. Paul. And yet this is the most noble, the most consoling, the most useful and the most vital of all sciences and subjects in heaven and on earth."

Then St. Grignion de Montfort has this very concise expression: "To know Jesus Christ incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we

need. To presume to know everything and not know Him is to know nothing at all.”⁷³ These words are better in Latin: *Qui Christum noscit, sat scit, si cætera nescit. Qui Christum nescit, nil scit, si cætera noscit.* These little words are perfectly precise, and they are magnificent. They truly contain our whole spirituality. We need to meditate on them often.⁷⁴

“All Christian knowledge is reduced to one single head, or rather, to use the words of the Apostle, this is eternal life: ‘*That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent*’ (Jn. 17:3).”⁷⁵

There you have the first thing necessary for the basis of our spiritual life, for the orientation of our spiritual life: “*To know Thee, the only God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.*”

“A teacher in the Church should, therefore, use his best endeavors that the faithful earnestly desire *to know Jesus Christ, and Him crucified* (1 Cor. 2:2).” Everything is right there. Don’t go looking elsewhere.⁷⁶

There is no replacement for simply coming to our Lord Himself and trying to take in His thoughts, His sentiments, His interior attitudes, His interior virtues, that we might know Him better who is our Creator and the author of our Redemption.⁷⁷

The mystery of Jesus Christ is so profound, so tremendous, that it seems almost more natural to worship in silence than to speak of it; we can fear, and justifiably, that we simply have no words and even no thoughts adequate to expressing all of the riches contained in the ineffable sanctuary of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul thinks likewise: “*At the same time 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).⁷⁸

⁷³ St. Louis de Montfort, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom (L’Amour de la Sagesse Eternelle, 1703-04)*, translated by A. Sommers, Montfort Publications, Bayshore, NY, 1960, ch. 1, §8, 11.

⁷⁴ Priests’ retreat, Ecône, September 7, 1982, 4th conference.

⁷⁵ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6. Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 8, 1987.

⁷⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 2nd conference.

⁷⁸ *Orantes simul et pro nobis ut Deus aperiat nobis ostium sermonis ad loquendum*

2.

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

1. A MYSTERY LONG ANNOUNCED

After the sin of Adam and Eve, God, in His immense charity, in His immense mercy, decided to send His Son, to send the Word. The Word was sent to take a body like our own for the Redemption of our sins.⁷⁹

God could have abandoned us to our disobedience, but He willed to show His mercy in a way that was absolutely ineffable, unexpected, tremendous. He willed to come down among us in taking a soul and a body like our own and in immolating Himself on the cross. He willed to go that far. Adam and Eve, after their sin, must have longed with all their heart for the accomplishment of that promise. They had repented, they were unhappy with what they had done, certainly they were sad for having displeased God, who had given them so many good things, so many virtues, so many qualities. They certainly suffered very much at the thought of having disobeyed Him, of having turned away from Him, from His commandment. God reestablished them, gave them back His grace, but not with all of the benefits which they had enjoyed before; and unfortunately they retained the consequences of original sin. So God told them that there would be a savior. And our Lord willed to choose for Himself a particular nation, to which Mary and Joseph would belong. From that nation came those two people chosen by God to welcome the gift of God to the world: Jesus.⁸⁰

Our Lord put centuries into preparing Mary's *fiat*. The entire history of the chosen people is a preparation for this exceptional creature who was to be the true Ark of the Covenant.⁸¹

Mysterium Christi... ut manifestem illud ita ut oportet me loqui. Itinéraire Spirituel, p. 45; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 9th conference.

⁸⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 10th conference.

⁸¹ Letter to Brother Priests, No. 69, Dakar, April 17, 1960; cf. *Pastoral Letters*:

We could say in truth that the entire Old Testament prepared the coming of the Virgin Mary. She was like the climax of all of the preparation of the Jewish people. The preparation of the coming of Jesus was the preparation of His mother. And on the day that saw the birth of the Virgin Mary, our Lord, the Word of God, could say, "Now is born the person who is going to be My mother."⁸²

2. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE MYSTERY

*At last came the fulfillment of the promise of the Savior,
with the fiat of Jesus and of Mary.*

As He entered the world, our Lord said to His Father, "Behold I come, that I should do Thy will" (Ps. 39:8-9). He says to Him, "You are sending Me into the world; behold, I am coming to do Your will, *fiat voluntas tua.*" And the most Blessed Virgin pronounces her own *fiat* (Lk. 1:38). *Fiat voluntas tua*, may Thy will be done.⁸³

That God should be made flesh, should be made man, should have become one of our own, is the most marvelous, the most extraordinary thing that could possibly occur. He came down from Heaven, He who is almighty. *Verbum caro factum est*, "The Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14). This statement is the greatest we could imagine, the most beautiful we could imagine, and it is thanks to the most Blessed Virgin that it took place. If she had not pronounced her *fiat*, God would not have become flesh; He would not have become one of our own.

All of the Catholic religion is there, in that mystery, in that extraordinary mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and consequently the Redemption.⁸⁴

3. THE BIRTH IN A MANGER

If we would like to spend a few moments in the cave at Bethlehem and try to ponder what happened at the birth of our Lord,

1947-1968, p. 109.

⁸² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 27, 1984, 12th conference.

⁸³ Spiritual conference to the Sisters of the Society, Albano, January 1, 1975.

⁸⁴ Spiritual conference to the Sisters of the Society, Albano, January 2, 1975.

let us follow the shepherds. We read joy on their faces, enthusiasm, at the thought that the angels have pointed out to them this Messiah, this Savior whom all Israel has been awaiting. He is born at last! *"This shall be a sign to you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger"* (Lk. 2:12). So the shepherds hurry to go and find this child, this Savior of Israel and of all nations. And if we could have gone alongside them and been with them, we would have found, as the Gospel says, Mary, Joseph, and the Child in the manger.

Notice the emphasis which the Gospel places on the fact that the infant Jesus truly was set down in a manger, in a food trough for animals.

The Church Herself loves showing us the details that surround the birth of Jesus. There had to have been animals. We sing in one of the responses on Christmas night, "O great mystery! Wondrous marvel! Animals have seen the newborn Savior, laid in a manger."⁸⁵ Animals saw Jesus. The Church is telling us that Jesus is not only the Creator, but He is the Master. All creatures have to render Him homage, even irrational creatures.

"And all flesh will see the salvation of the Lord" (Lk. 3:6). The flesh of men, the flesh of birds, the flesh of animals and of fish were to see our Lord (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15:39), for He is the Creator and the Master of them all.

So Jesus willed to be born in a manger.⁸⁶

4. A MYSTERY OF MERCIFUL LOVE

Charity, which casts a certain amount of light on the Holy Trinity, also casts light on Christ. Charity is the whole mission of Christ on earth.⁸⁷

Why did God the Father send His Son to earth? Why did He ask the Word to become incarnate? It was to redeem us, certainly – that is the first motive; but it was also to make Himself known to us in a more direct manner, more attainable by the senses, more adapted to us. Our Redemption happened through the Incarna-

⁸⁵ 4th response of Christmas Matins.

⁸⁶ Sermon, Ecône, December 25, 1976.

⁸⁷ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

tion of the Word so that we might better know God and the road we have to follow in order to return to Him. St. Paul affirms it in his Epistle to the Hebrews: “*Last of all in these days God has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world; who is the brightness of His glory and the image of His substance*” (Heb. 1:2-3). Therefore we cannot imagine a more perfect human image of God than our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸⁸ Our Lord is truly God on earth. And this giving of Jesus Christ to man by God the Father is the fruit of His charity. “*God is charity*” (1 John 4:8), as St. John says. And he goes on, “*In this has the charity of God been shown in our case, that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we may live through Him*” (1 John 4:9).⁸⁹

God is charity; it is His very essence. And His charity contains everything He needs to be merciful. The word *mercy, misericordia*, comes from the word *miser*, misery, and the word *cor*, the heart. Merciful means: having a heart that goes out to misery.

It is good to meditate a little bit on that quality because it explains all of history, and in particular the Incarnation of the Word and the Redemption. God permitted His own creatures to disobey Him and so was able to show His great mercy. He did not will that the work of His charity in creating angels and men be destroyed by the malice of angels and men, and that is why He carried out the Redemption.⁹⁰

3.

THE TITLES OF JESUS CHRIST

In the following passages, Archbishop Lefebvre is admiring Jesus Christ, true God and true man. He treats at length of His divinity, and then shows Him coming into this world as Savior, as Priest, as Prophet, and as King.

⁸⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 35, a. 2.

⁸⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

⁹⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 1st conference.

1. JESUS CHRIST: A BEING LIKE NO OTHER

Before examining the titles of Jesus one by one, we can discover certain aspects of His immeasurable greatness in an initial, more general consideration.

1. A sublime creature

The consequences of the union of the Word of God – of God Himself – with a human soul and body, truly make this human creature a subject unique in His kind, more divine than human and more spiritual than corporal; our Lord's entire life is going to be the illustration. He lives more in Heaven than on earth, because He is Heaven. His Person has all power over His soul and His body, even the power to separate them and reunite them as He wishes and when He wishes.

His glory, His power, His sanctity, His wisdom, the permanence of the eternal mission from His Father in the faithful realization of His temporal mission of salvation: all of these radiate from His life, from His actions, from His words.⁹¹

2. The soul of Jesus

St. John writes of Jesus in his prologue, "We saw His glory, glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth" (Jn. 1:14).⁹²

The mystery is that this man who walked in Palestine is the Word of God, by whom all things were made. The divine Person in fact assumed that human nature, that soul which thinks humanly, that soul which wills humanly, that soul which reflects humanly – for our Lord was a perfect man. He therefore had a human soul. But His thoughts were attributed to God, because there is no other subject of attribution in our Lord than the Word of God. Therefore, all of the acts of our Lord, of whatever kind, were divine acts, because actions are attributed to the person. Nonetheless He had all of the human faculties, a body and human gifts.⁹³

⁹¹ *Itinéraire spirituel*, p. 54; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 39.

⁹² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 7, a. 1.

⁹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 6, 1977.

The grace of the hypostatic union⁹⁴ confers on our Lord's body and soul a sanctifying grace which is absolutely unique.⁹⁵ It is so abundant that it is in fact the source of all sanctifying graces,⁹⁶ which are simply the communication of the Holy Spirit, our Lord's Spirit of charity, "of which we have all received" (Jn. 1:16).⁹⁷

This sanctifying grace produced marvelous effects in our Lord's body and soul. His soul received the beatific vision as soon as it came into being. He enjoyed this vision in His soul throughout His earthly life and even on the cross. It is indeed a great mystery that His soul was at the same time inundated with the most perfect bliss and overwhelmed with pain and sorrow!

Since He had the beatific vision in His soul, the only theological virtue which our Lord could possess was charity, not faith or hope, which both disappear in the beatific vision.

It is hard for us to have a full and true appreciation of the depth and abundance of charity in the soul of Jesus. But even this grace, so ineffably perfect yet nonetheless created, cannot be compared to the infinite wellspring of charity from which it flows, and which is simply the divine life of Jesus in the bosom of the Trinity.

This sanctifying grace, uniquely rich, flooded the soul of Jesus with the virtues, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the beatitudes, and the fruits of the Holy Ghost.⁹⁸

3. *Jesus' knowledge*

The union of the Person of the Word with the human soul of Jesus confers on that soul the unique privilege of having the beatific vision from the very instant of its creation.

Clearly, Jesus-God has no need of that knowledge; His own divine knowledge infinitely surpasses the knowledge of the beatific vision. Nevertheless, the Creator of all things willed to assume to His Person a human soul and body, and so He also assumed their faculties of knowledge and understanding and brought them to their greatest possible perfection.

⁹⁴ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 2, a. 6.

⁹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 6, a. 6.

⁹⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 7, a. 1.

⁹⁷ *De quo nos omnes accepimus*.

⁹⁸ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 49-50; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 35.

Therefore the soul of Jesus possessed the beatific vision, the infused knowledge of the angels, and experiential knowledge of men; and all these to the most perfect degree which can possibly be given to a creature, angelic or human.

And so from the moment of His Incarnation, the incarnate Son of God could see by His human nature everything and all things, be they present, past or future, whether actions, words or thoughts, with respect to whomever and of whatever time period; and all this He saw in the divine Word that He Himself was.⁹⁹

These divine realities in Jesus Christ shine a light on the intimate and personal relations of Jesus with all of the created spirits in Heaven and on earth. Even in His human soul, Jesus knows each one of us, and He knows us in all the details of our lives; nothing escapes Him, whether as Creator or as Savior. And this knowledge inspires in Him an immense love for the souls who look to Him, who give themselves to Him, who do His will. His soul longs intensely to share His glory with them. This is why Jesus is going to be the Judge of every soul.¹⁰⁰

4. *Jesus subject to suffering and death*

Since our Lord did not have original sin and had not committed any personal sin, He was not bound to undergo the consequences of sin; but He willed to endure those consequences which were not incompatible with His dignity as Son of God. And so He knew suffering and death because He willed to do so.

However, our Lord was never sick because sickness is a beginning of decomposition. Moreover, when He died, His body remained absolutely intact. It was not at all like Lazarus, for example, whose sister Martha told our Lord not to roll away the stone because the body had already begun to smell (*Jn.* 11:39). Decomposition had therefore already set in for Lazarus. But our Lord in the tomb did not suffer the least decomposition in His body. His divinity always remained united to His body, just as it was united to His soul. His soul went to visit the just of the Old Testament while His body remained in the tomb. And when He willed it, He reunited His soul to His body by His own decision, by His

⁹⁹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 10, a. 2, 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 52-53; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 37-38.

almighty power, because He is God, because He is the almighty Word.¹⁰¹

5. *Beyond the human face of Jesus*

We must not reduce the existence of our Lord to His bodily presence in Palestine. Let us not limit the Person of the Word to that body which we could have seen, nor even to that soul which animates that body. God is always God. He is the Eternal, the Almighty. The Word is not limited to the soul and the body of our Lord. His almightiness is not enclosed, limited, restricted to that body. As He animates that body and that soul, it is God who is speaking through them. And at that moment He is holding the entire world in existence.¹⁰²

And so, let us not be of those who only look at the human face of our Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously, it is easier to picture Him as a man, such as He was in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, in Palestine, on the cross. We can and we ought to picture Him like that also. St. Thomas says very clearly that, if we consider Him in His humanity as we pray, it will be the means of enlivening our devotion.¹⁰³ But we have to be careful not to consider just His humanity. We always have to keep in mind that behind His humanity dwells the divinity. It is a miracle that our Lord Jesus Christ was not simply always in splendor as He was on Mount Tabor. Normally He would have been radiant and He would have had a glorified body, since He had the beatific vision. But in order to suffer and to die for us on the cross, He willed to share our human condition to the full. Yet, our Lord cannot be separated from the two other divine Persons; He is the Son of God, essentially united to the others.¹⁰⁴

After this contemplation of Jesus, His principal titles will allow us to go more deeply into the unfathomable mystery which He represents for man while he is in this land of exile.

¹⁰¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 27, 1984, 12th conference.

¹⁰² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 8, 1987.

¹⁰³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

¹⁰⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 17, 1978.

2. JESUS IS GOD

1. *The personality of Jesus*

If we ponder just a little bit the personality of Jesus, we really are struck dumb with astonishment, with admiration. We are in front of the greatest mystery, the most beautiful mystery that men have ever witnessed: that God should become man!¹⁰⁵

Through a mystery of grace and of God's love, we see a unity between the human soul, the human body of Jesus, and God Himself, such that they form a single Person in two natures. There is a perfect unity.¹⁰⁶

It is the very Person of the Word, therefore God Himself, who animates this child. Our Lord is not a human person. He is a divine Person. It is therefore the Word of God incarnate who presents Himself to us under this form of a child. But then, does this child really have infinite knowledge? Does He carry all creatures in His hands? Is He really the Creator of the world?

Yes, He really is the Creator of the world. The Church says it in the liturgy of Christmastide: "You have enclosed in your womb the one whom the world cannot contain."¹⁰⁷ For indeed the world does not contain God; it is God who contains the world.¹⁰⁸

"Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth, and the heavens are works of Thy hands" (Heb. 1:10).

St. Paul could have spoken those words to the infant Jesus in the manger. When we address someone, we address the person. Well, that person was the Word of God, through whom all things were made, all things were created.¹⁰⁹

Our Lord is the God who created all things and who continues to maintain all creatures in existence, and therefore us as well.¹¹⁰ God is present with us, and He cannot be otherwise. Therefore, this man whom St. John says he touched with his hands (1 John 1:1) was God Himself. He was the one upholding all things

¹⁰⁵ Sermon, Ecône, December 25, 1976.

¹⁰⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 20, 1978.

¹⁰⁷ 7th response of Matins of the Circumcision of our Lord.

¹⁰⁸ Sermon, Ecône, December 25, 1976.

¹⁰⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 6, 1977.

¹¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *II Sent.*, dist. 37, q. 1, a. 2.

in existence. It is extraordinary, incredible, unimaginable. God became man and dwelt among us!¹¹¹

2. *The witnesses to the divinity of Jesus*

1. A cloud of witnesses

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). On the day of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, 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 coming of 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!¹¹²

2. Jesus' own statements

"No one has ascended into Heaven except Him who has descended from Heaven: the Son of Man who is in Heaven" (*Jn.* 3:13).

There you have a sentence that casts a tremendous light on our Lord: *"No one has ascended into Heaven except Him who has descended from Heaven."* So, what is Heaven? Heaven is the Father, it is God. It is not a place where the Father resides, it is the Father Himself. Heaven is God. St. Paul says that, *"God will be all in all"* (*1 Cor.* 15:28), and it is God who is Heaven.

¹¹¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 11, 1983.

¹¹² Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1981, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 67.

Our Lord is speaking here of *"Him who has descended from Heaven,"* therefore who has descended from God, and He adds, so as to be very precise about the one He means, *"the Son of Man who is in Heaven,"* that is to say who lives in His Father. Consequently, the one who is there, before the Apostles, is in Heaven at that moment. We can join these texts to other passages of the Gospel of St. John: *"No one has seen God"* (Jn. 1:18), but *"He who is with God has seen the Father"* (cf. Jn. 6:46).

Once again it is the Son of God incarnate who can say, *"I am from above"* (cf. Jn. 3:31), meaning from God, whereas His listeners are from the earth, are from below.¹¹³

Jesus is affirming His divinity when He answers the Jews who say to Him, *"Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?"* *"Before Abraham came to be, I am"* (Jn. 8:58).

"I am," therefore He is Being; He has always been: *"I am."* Our Lord says this of Himself, and therefore we must conclude that He is eternal. Yet our Lord really was born in Bethlehem, so He really did have a beginning. Certainly, since He took a body, He was incarnated in time, but our Lord, as a divine Person, is eternal; He has always existed.¹¹⁴

"Before Abraham came to be, I am." Our Lord speaks in the present of eternity. That is when the Jews rushed at Him and intended to stone Him (Jn. 8:59). It was a clear affirmation of His divinity, all the more so because the Jews call God Jehovah, *He who is.*

The perfect unity of the Son and of the Father is likewise an ongoing reality belonging to the present. *"I and the Father are one"* (Jn. 10:30). Could He affirm His unity any more clearly, any more perfectly?¹¹⁵

3. The declaration of St. Peter

Remember that our Lord asked Peter to tell Him who the people thought He was. God knows our Lord must have been a subject of conversation throughout Palestine! 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?"*

¹¹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 20, 1978.

¹¹⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 17, 1978.

¹¹⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 20, 1978.

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 after him: Our Lord is the Son of God.¹¹⁶

4. The revelation of St. John

The most beautiful page of St. John is the one that we read every day at the end of the holy Mass as a thanksgiving: the prologue of his Gospel. We have certainly read and re-read it and know it by heart. But we still need to read it again attentively, peacefully, so as to be really imbued with what St. John writes of our Lord, for it truly is the revelation of our Lord. The first five verses are about the Person of the Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1).

"In the beginning was the Word." As the commentators point out, these words mean that before there was such a thing as a beginning, the Word *was*. He existed. And the use of the imperfect tense in Greek is the best expression of this concept. One could not say: the Word *came to be*, but only that He *was*. So it expresses the perennity, the eternity of the Word before all things began.

"And the word was with God, and the Word was God." In this verse, we can already glimpse the consubstantiality of the Word and the Father. By the very fact that the Word was in God, He was with Him and at the same time He was God; there is both distinction and unity. A person might suppose that what the Church later defined as *consubstantiality* is only an invention of the Church, or of the Fathers, or of the philosophers who taught in the Church and came up with the term. So a person could try to claim that because this word is not found explicitly in the Gospel, it does not truly represent the reality of Revelation in the Gospel. But that is false. The Gospel expresses this truth very clearly, and we cannot reach any other conclusion for the Holy Trinity than consubstanti-

¹¹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 303.

ality. And therefore, “*the Word was God*”!¹¹⁷

“*All things were made through Him, and without Him was made nothing that has been made*” (Jn. 1:3).

St. John unveils for us that the Father created all things through the Son. Why? Because, as Word of God, the Son is both the knowledge and the wisdom of God. God cannot create without wisdom and without knowledge.

The Father created by His wisdom, who is a divine Person, at once distinct from Him and consubstantial with Him: who is God like Him. The Father created all things and nothing that has been made was made without that wisdom, without that divine knowledge which is the Word of God. All things were made through Him.¹¹⁸

“*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men*” (Jn. 1:4).

The life spoken of here is especially spiritual life. St. John affirms that all intellectual and spiritual life in us comes from the Word. It is like a continual communication of the light that is in God. This light is diffused and comes to us by the intermediary of the Word. It is this light which illuminates our minds. We would be incapable of the least intellectual conception, of formulating an idea or reasoning, without the light of the Word. All that our intellect studies, conceives or produces occurs under the illumination of the Word.¹¹⁹ It is a stupendous thing!

We can suppose that St. John perhaps came closer to our Lord than any other Apostle. He was chosen in a special way, because it is to him that Jesus confided His mother. St. John is called “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (cf. Jn. 13:23; 19:26). Our Lord had a preference for him, and surely He gave St. John special graces to know Him better and more deeply than the others.

That is why we have to let the words of St. John soak into us, as we try to form an idea of our Lord closer to the one he was able to have.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 29, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 168-169.

¹¹⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 20, 1980.

¹¹⁹ Even the natural light of reason is a participation in the divine light which is the Word.

¹²⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 20, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp.

5. The proclamation of St. Paul

St. Paul likewise celebrated the greatness of our Lord, His power and His divinity, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here is what he says:

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world; who, being the brightness of His glory and the image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, has effected man’s purgation from sin and taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high,¹²¹ having become so much superior to the angels as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.” (Heb. 1:1-4)

Here he is clearly speaking of the Son and of Him who purified us from our sins, therefore of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not only of the Word. There is no distinction between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Word. So Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

“For to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Thou art My Son, I this day have begotten Thee’ (Ps. 2:7)? And again, ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’ (2 Sam. 7:14)? And again, when He brings the Firstborn into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God adore Him’ (Ps. 96:7). And of the angels indeed He says, ‘He makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire’ (Ps. 103:4). But of the Son, ‘Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and a scepter of equity is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou has loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.’ (Ps. 44:7-8) And, ‘Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth, and the heavens are works of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt continue; and they shall all grow old as does a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.’ (Ps. 103:26-28) Now to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thy enemies the footstool of Thy feet’ (Ps. 109:1)? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent for service, for the sake of those who shall inherit salvation?” (Heb. 1:5-14)

St. Paul insists on the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore on His perfection, infinitely greater than that of the an-

169, 170.

¹²¹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 58, a. 4.

gels, who are only creatures.¹²²

St. Paul's descriptions of our Lord are magnificent and they really call us to make Jesus Christ our life – *Mihi vivere Christus est, "For me to live is Christ"* (Phil. 1:21) – and to become constantly more *Christian*.¹²³

3. *Jesus: The center of history*

Our Lord is the center of human history, and it cannot be otherwise. This event is so incredible, so tremendous, so important in the history of humanity that it has to be like the magnetic pole attracting all souls, those created before His coming and those who would appear after His coming. All of them must turn toward our Lord, toward God come among us to offer Himself on the cross. So the cross of our Lord literally dominates the history of the world.¹²⁴

The history of the world and the history of all creation revolve around our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord is truly the summit, the center and the heart of all creation. So we can't talk about history, for example, and disregard the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world, disregard all the influence of the Holy Church, His mystical Spouse, His Mystical Body (*Eph. 1:23*), of which we are members by baptism. You see how many consequences there are to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ!¹²⁵

It is clear that this God-man is a great mystery. But we absolutely have to meditate on it, have to know the reality and the truth of it, because it is our faith, it is our entire life and it is the life of the whole world. Nothing happens in the world except in view of our Lord Jesus Christ, for Him or against Him, with Him or without Him, and the key to solving all problems is our Lord. There is no problem here below to which our Lord is indifferent. Men may certainly try to carry on without Him: He is everywhere, in everything, since He created everything. He therefore holds everything in His hands. Everything belongs to Him, and nothing is outside of Him. Men try to escape Him; they do not escape Him;

¹²² Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 6, 1977.

¹²³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 45; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 30.

¹²⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 10th conference.

¹²⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 11, 1983.

they cannot escape Him. It is impossible, because everything is His.

Concretely, we cannot understand anything of the history of humanity without our Lord Jesus Christ, because He is at the center of history. Absolutely everything was made through Him and for Him.

And the only happiness of men is to unite themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, that is to say, to live His life – to live the life of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, since He is God. He gives us the means to do so. That is the reason He came.¹²⁶

So then how can we imagine that man could be indifferent to the presence of the Word of God in our midst? It is not possible. God willed to come down among us. Who then can say, “I personally don’t care, I live my life, I don’t need our Lord to be able to make a living.” It’s unthinkable. The fact that God should have come to earth, have taken a soul and a body like ours, should have come to dwell among us – how could it not affect man! It is not possible. All the more so that He came to redeem us from our sins! It therefore concerns all of us, because we are all sinners.¹²⁷

4. *Reactions to the divinity of Jesus*

1. Refusal of the divinity of Jesus

Jesus “*came unto His own, and His own received Him not*” (Jn. 1:11). It is so true. It is a great mystery, obviously. Men make a choice: for or against our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²⁸

The principal objection of those who opposed Jesus and crucified Him is that our Lord Jesus Christ said that He was God. That is what Annas and Caiphas asked our Lord:

“Just tell us, are you God or not?”

“Yes, I am God.”

“He has blasphemed!” (cf. Mt. 26:63-65)

Rather than bowing before the truth, rather than believing that He was God, they crucified Him, they put Him to death.

¹²⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 5, 1977.

¹²⁷ Spiritual conference, December 6, 1977.

¹²⁸ Spiritual conference, October 11, 1983.

“Show us whether or not You really are God; come down from the cross and we will believe. You who raised the dead, come down from the cross and we will believe.” (cf. Mt. 27:40, 42) The wretches! Could He not raise Himself, who had just raised Lazarus? They were even afraid it would happen so they put a guard at the tomb. Ultimately they believed in His resurrection, but they did not believe in His divinity. They paid the guards to say that the Apostles had come to take the body while they slept.

And as St. Augustine so well points out, if the guards were sleeping how could they know whether the Apostles had come and taken Him or not?¹²⁹ Thus, even as the Church and the heavens are proclaiming the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the word of St. John is only too true: *“He came unto His own, and they did not receive Him.”*

“They did not receive Him.” God come down among us, the beginning and the end, the Creator of all things, He who made all spirits, all men, all the material world, comes to save us and He is not received.

Indeed, there we have the whole history of the Church, for twenty centuries, unfolding before our eyes. We see that opposition to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in every way that could possibly be imagined.

The Church, on the other hand, is filled with that faith in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹³⁰

2. Jesus: Sign of contradiction

Humanity divides itself into two groups. It was already apparent on Calvary, with the good thief and the bad thief. There are those who do not know our Lord Jesus Christ and who despise Him, and there are those who do believe and who adore Him.¹³¹

St. John says, *“I have not written to you as to those who do not know the truth, but as to those who know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. No one who disowns*

¹²⁹ St. Augustine, *Treatise on the Psalms*, Ps. 63:7 (office of the 2nd nocturn of Holy Saturday).

¹³⁰ Sermon, Ecône, April 19, 1987.

¹³¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 2nd conference.

the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that which you have heard from the beginning abide in you. If that abides in you which you have heard from the beginning, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has given us, life everlasting.” (1 John 2:21-25)

A little farther down he repeats the same thing: *“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus, is not of God.” (1 John 4:2-3)* Clear and simple! *“He is of Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he is coming, and now is already in the world” (1 John 4:2-3).*

So, you see, the statements of the Gospel, of the Apostles, are perfectly clear: those who affirm the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ are of God; those who deny it are not of God. And the consequences are terrible. You have to think of this world around us, of all humanity living today and of humanity gone by. Our Lord Jesus Christ and His divinity are the ultimate deciding factor for men, the deciding factor for eternal life.¹³²

For the most part, the errors and divisions that have torn through the Church have always been more or less related to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, directly or indirectly. Arianism, Pelagianism, are essentially attacks on the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then, later on, Protestant naturalism, which we are still suffering from today in a very particular manner, refuses to recognize the supernatural or that we are authentically sons of God. Yes, for sure, we are sons only by participation and by adoption; we are sons only because of the Firstborn Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ. All of the truth of the Roman Catholic Church reposes on that affirmation, on that proclamation of our faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God.

And still today, what is it that divides Christians? It is precisely that dogma of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The reason people are attacking miracles today is that they want to explain those miracles away as natural occurrences, so they will be able say that our Lord Jesus Christ is a prophet, a kind of superman, but not truly the Son of God.¹³³

And today, unfortunately, we can sense the emptiness of the speeches, the sermons of those people who are having trouble af-

¹³² Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 6, 1977.

¹³³ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974.

firming the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because if you affirm the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, you turn all of the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ against you, and God knows if He has enemies today. Freemasonry has not given up the battle against our Lord. And socialism and communism are basically an assault on every law which our Lord inscribed in nature or gave us through the Gospel. All that is constantly being dismantled and attacked by those governments which are radically anti-Christian.¹³⁴

3. The necessary confession of the faith

You have chosen, we have chosen to be on the side of our Lord Jesus Christ, in spite of the difficulties it holds for our poor intellect, in spite of the consequences it has for ourselves. Believing in our Lord Jesus Christ, affirming His divinity, means believing in His work as a whole. So it means believing in the Church, one, holy, Catholic, apostolic, and Roman. It means believing in the value of His sacrifice; it means believing in the necessity of baptism in order to be saved.

One of the psalms talks about those *who have not received their soul in vain* (Ps. 23:4). I hope that we are among them. It is God who has given us our soul, it is not our parents. Our parents were the occasion for the creation of that soul, but it is God who created our soul directly. And God willed to sanctify it by baptism, washing it in His blood and giving us, by the very fact, faith, hope and charity. So we have to know our Lord Jesus Christ and we have to live His life.¹³⁵

After considering at length the divinity of Jesus Christ, we turn now to reflect on the Incarnate Word as Mediator, Savior, Priest, Prophet, and King. Archbishop Lefebvre names these titles in his Spiritual Journey, founding them on the grace in Christ of the hypostatic union.

If this Man is God, what an abundance of gifts must fill His soul and His body! The fact that God has taken to Himself this soul and this body confers on that Man unique attributes, rights, gifts, and privileges, beyond anything we can imagine.

¹³⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 3, 1980.

¹³⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 11, 1983.

Three particular graces adorn the soul and the body of Jesus, from the moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and from the infusion of the soul into the body which was prepared for it.

The first grace, which is also the source of the other two,¹³⁶ is unique in all of creation. By his eternal decision to unite to His Person a soul and a body, God the Word communicated His very divinity to these creatures in a mysterious, ineffable manner, to the degree that they were capable of receiving it, according to the divine will. It is called the grace of the hypostatic union, which confers a divine dignity upon this soul and this body. All of the acts of this soul and this body are consequently divine, and are justly attributed to God, who assumes responsibility for every action of this soul and this body.

By its very nature, and necessarily, this grace of union confers upon the Person living in this human nature certain unique titles: Mediator, Savior, Priest, Prophet, and King. All mediation, all priesthood, all royalty among creatures can only be some participation in these properties which are the natural and proper ornaments of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹³⁷

3. JESUS IS THE SAVIOR

By the very meaning of His name, Jesus is first and foremost the Savior.

1. *The sole Mediator and Savior*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a mediator.¹³⁸ 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*

¹³⁶ The second grace is the sanctifying grace of Jesus, or capital grace, which was mentioned above. The third, that of the charisms, will be discussed in the section entitled "Jesus Is the Prophet."

¹³⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 48, *Spiritual Journey*, p. 33.

¹³⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 22, a. 1.

damnata, as St. Augustine says: that mass of humanity condemned by our own fault (*Rom.* 5:12).¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who unites in Himself the divine nature and a human nature in a single Person, which is the divine Person, the Person of the Word, becomes by the very fact the Savior of humanity, the only Savior of humanity. There is no other Savior; there is no other path to salvation besides our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴¹

Jesus Himself said it: “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.*” (*Jn.* 14:6) We therefore cannot go to Heaven without going through our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴²

2. *Savior from sin*

1. The name of Jesus

If we turn to the most Blessed Virgin Mary to ask her what happened, she will tell us of the conversation which she had with the angel Gabriel when he appeared. She will tell us that His name is Jesus because He came to save Israel and all nations.

And if we ask St. Joseph, he will tell us, “I hesitated. I wondered how it was possible that Mary was bearing a child and I wanted to step away, but an angel came to tell me: ‘*Do not be afraid, Joseph, the child which she carries is come through the operation of the Holy Spirit, and you will call His name Jesus.*’” It was the custom among the Jews for the father to give the name. That is why it

¹³⁹ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, bk. XXI, § 12; *Contra Julianum*, bk. III, § 35.

¹⁴⁰ Sermon, Ecône, December 4, 1988, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 200.

¹⁴¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 5th conference.

¹⁴² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 7th conference.

is St. Joseph who gave the name to Jesus. And the angel goes on, "because it is He who will save Israel" (cf. Mt. 1:20-21).

So, if we ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and the shepherds, they will tell us, "Here is the Savior of Israel and of all nations." So our first introduction to Jesus is under that essential aspect.

But is there even a need for Him to save us? Where does the necessity of salvation come from? From the sin of man. We are sinners. If there had been no sin, Jesus would not have come to earth, at least not in the circumstances which Providence defined and made known to us. This Child has therefore come to redeem us from our sins.¹⁴³

2. Doctor of souls

Jesus comes to save us. So He is constantly giving expression to that yearning which is fundamental in Him: that desire to save souls. Even while He is saving bodies, while He is giving sight to the blind, or as He gives the paralytic the ability to walk again, He has no other goal than to save souls.

In saving bodies, He is saving souls because He demands faith of those whom He wishes to heal. Therefore He saves them by the faith which they have in Him. So He is communicating sanctifying grace to them at the same time.

"Kindness to sinners is not an exceptional fact in the life of Christ, or merely the result of fortuitous circumstances. It was an attitude considered and constant, the effect of a principle to which He held. 'The Son of Man is come,' He said, 'to save that which was lost' (Mt. 18:11)."¹⁴⁴

It is a fundamental attitude in our Lord. We find it throughout Holy Scripture. He does everything for this goal: for the salvation of souls. Since God is charity, all that He does can only be charity. And mercy is the summit of charity. A person can give no better expression to his charity than by being merciful. The summit of charity toward our neighbor is to forgive him the wrong he may have done us, to love him in spite of his miseries, in spite of

¹⁴³ Sermon, Ecône, December 25, 1976.

¹⁴⁴ Fr. Felix Klein, *Jesus and His Apostles*, trans. by W. P. Baines, Longman's, Green and Co., London, 1932, p. 226.

his sins. Obviously, our Lord always lays down the condition of repentance. When He takes away sin, when He gives life back to a soul, it is because that soul opened itself by repentance to receiving that forgiveness. But He is constantly forgiving.

It is therefore “an attitude considered and constant, the effect of a principle to which He held. Our Lord says, ‘They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick. Go then and learn what this meaneth: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’; for I am not come to call the just, but sinners.’ (Mt. 9:12-13)

“His actions conformed so well to this principle that sinners, taking heart, came near to Him and He welcomed them – spoke to Him and He answered them – asked Him to their house and He accepted the invitation. It was not, most assuredly, that in order to win them, He suppressed or even relaxed in any degree the laws of morality; He did not forgive them unless they repented, unless they renounced evil, and His discourse with them is always ended by: ‘Go and sin no more.’ But before coming to that, He had listened to them, He had looked into their eyes, He had spoken to them of the goodness of the Father, He had opened His arms so that, weeping, they might throw themselves into them. And so we see them everywhere pressing eagerly around Him... ‘Now the publicans and sinners,’ St. Luke tells us, ‘drew near unto Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured amongst themselves, saying: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”’ (Lk. 15:1-2)

“Let us, this time, bless their narrowness, for it provoked from the Master a reply of such a kind that no page of the Gospel, unless it be the story of the Passion, has ever surpassed, or perhaps even equaled, its marvelous influence on poor human souls.

“And the crowd in wonderment, the Pharisees in confusion, the sinners radiant with hope, the Apostles glowing with pride in their Master, heard these three parables: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Groat, and the Prodigal Son.”¹⁴⁵

These three parables show precisely that great mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is good for us to go back to them, so as to understand better our Lord’s goodness toward us. I think we have to place ourselves in that climate of the mercy of our Lord. We will

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 226-227.

never really understand the reason for His coming into this world if we do not put ourselves in that atmosphere of the mercy of our Lord, in the climate of Jesus-Savior.¹⁴⁶

3. *Outside of Jesus, no salvation*

The sanctifying grace of Jesus is such a unique and abundant source of salvation that it is rightly called by a name proper to our Lord: *Gratia capitis*, the grace of the leader or of the head – making perfectly clear at the same time that in all salutary action and in all action which concerns the spiritual good, everything ultimately comes from and returns to Jesus Christ alone, the Son of God incarnate.¹⁴⁷

“*There is no salvation outside our Lord*” (cf. Acts 4:12)¹⁴⁸ All those who work for the salvation of souls have to base their activity on this principle of the capital grace of our Lord. A thing done with no relation directly or indirectly to our Lord is vain and useless for salvation.¹⁴⁹

Our Lord willed that all souls be saved by Him, by His humanity and by His Church, which is the extension of His humanity in time and space. We do not have the right to say, “No, no, there are plenty of souls who can be saved without going through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁰

You see, all of those errors floating around us, telling us we can be saved outside the Catholic religion and outside of our Lord Jesus Christ, are contrary to what the Gospel affirms.

I have seen articles written by the bishops’ conference of Holland about means of salvation in non-Christian religions. It is insanity to make that kind of statement. There are no means of salvation outside the Catholic religion and outside our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no salvation outside the Church. It is a dogma of our faith. Why? Because there are no supernatural graces except those that come through the Church.

¹⁴⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 2nd conference.

¹⁴⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 51; *Spiritual Journey*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ *Non est in alio aliquo salus*.

¹⁴⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 51; *Spiritual Journey*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 1, 1974.

Even those graces which could conceivably be distributed in other religions can only come from our Lord Jesus Christ and the prayer of His Church, His mystical Spouse who is united to Him.¹⁵¹

To the name of Jesus we add that of Christ, which means the one anointed, the one made sacred, the one consecrated. In the Old Testament, kings were anointed, sometimes prophets, and always the high priest. Our Lord exercised to the full these three functions of pontiff, of prophet and of king.

4. JESUS IS THE PRIEST

1. *The source of the priesthood of Christ*

By reason of the hypostatic union, our Lord is not only the Mediator and the Savior, but He is also the Priest. He is the Priest because He is the Pontiff, that is to say, one who makes a bridge between Heaven and earth. He is truly the pontiff, the perfect priest, the priest in every sense of the word.¹⁵²

The grace of the hypostatic union 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.¹⁵³

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 became a priest in the instant of assuming that humanity in the womb of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 5, 1977.

¹⁵² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 5th conference.

¹⁵³ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 198.

¹⁵⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 197-198.

2. *What is 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. Where does this perfection come from? 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.¹⁵⁵

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.

¹⁵⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 22, a. 1, 4; q. 48, a. 3.

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 hypostatic union. 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,¹⁵⁶ 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, the priest and the 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.¹⁵⁷ 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.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 22, a. 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 8, a. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Retreat, Ecône, September 22, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 192-194.

5. JESUS IS THE PROPHET

Christ not only enjoyed the grace of union and the capital grace, described above, but He was also endowed with the exceptional charisms justifying His title of prophet.

In addition to this sanctifying grace, *gratum faciens*, source of the sanctity of the soul and the body of Jesus, came also all of those graces, *gratis datae*,¹⁵⁹ which Jesus enjoyed¹⁶⁰ in order to fulfill His unique role as Savior, Sanctifier, Glorifier: graces of healing, of miracles, of prodigies, of the diversity of tongues, of the interpretation of languages, and especially prophecy,¹⁶¹ because Jesus was the Prophet both by His divine nature and by His human nature. After Jesus, there were no more prophets, but the Apostles, as the instruments of the Prophet, would constitute, by Tradition and Scripture, the deposit of the faith, which was complete upon the death of the last of the Apostles. The successors of the Apostles had only to transmit faithfully and exactly the truths contained in that deposit.

After the prophetic period was to come the dogmatic period, during which popes and bishops would be responsible for maintaining and transmitting the deposit without alteration, *in eodem sensu et eadem sententia*, until the end of time. So we see the capital importance of a proper notion of Jesus Prophet.¹⁶²

6. JESUS IS THE KING

Jesus is the King of the universe by several claims: as God, as man united to the Word, and as Savior of mankind by His blood shed on the cross.

If our Lord Jesus Christ is God, then all of the consequences flow from there immediately. If He is God, He is Master: master of all things, master of the world, of the elements, of individuals, of families, of society, Creator and end of all things.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Freely given: these are extraordinary charisms given in order to help in the salvation of others (*Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 111, a. 1).

¹⁶⁰ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 7, a. 7.

¹⁶¹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 7, a. 8.

¹⁶² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 50; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 35-36.

¹⁶³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 13, 1978.

Our Lord, who is the Son of God, came into this world as our Redeemer,¹⁶⁴ our Savior, our High Priest, so that He might reign over us in a perfect manner, a total manner.¹⁶⁵ By the cross did He conquer His kingdom, if we may so express it. We sing it at Passiontide, *Regnavit a ligno crucis*, "He has reigned by the wood of the cross."¹⁶⁶

1. *Jesus proclaimed King*

Did Jesus proclaim that He was king? Absolutely! You remember that extraordinary account of our Lord before Pilate. The procurator asked Him the question explicitly, "Are You a king?" Our Lord answers, "You have said it, I am a king." (Jn. 18:37)

And in the *Acts of the Apostles*, it is stated explicitly that, during the forty days that our Lord spent among His Apostles after the Resurrection, He spoke to them of the kingdom of God (*Acts* 1:3). The sacred writer summarizes in this way all of our Lord's conversations with His Apostles for the forty days which followed His Resurrection. So we can believe that, if there was one thing that was important for our Lord, it was His kingdom. He said it Himself in such a beautiful, profound way, in His prayer of the *Pater*. Could anything have been dearer to His heart than the kingdom of God, since it was of the kingdom of God that He was speaking when He said, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" (*Mt.* 6:10)?

Moreover, Holy Scripture and the entire liturgy sing the kingdom of God, not only on the day of the feast of Christ the King but also in many other circumstances. Remember the words which are sung at Christmas, "Behold a Child is given to us; behold the Son of God is given to us, upon whose shoulders rests the empire, rests the command" (*Is.* 9:6).¹⁶⁷

It is the same thing for the feast of Epiphany, "Behold the Lord,

¹⁶⁴ *Summa Theologica* III^a, q. 48, a. 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Summa Theologica* III^a, q. 8, a. 6; see also Fr. Héris, "Renseignements Techniques (Technical Notes)" in *Le Verbe Incarné (The Incarnate Word)* (*Summa Theologica*), vol. II, *La Revue des Jeunes*, Paris, 1927, pp. 364-371.

¹⁶⁶ "God has reigned by the wood" (*Vexilla Regis*, Vespers hymn of Passiontide). Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

¹⁶⁷ Introit of the Mass of the Day for Christmas: *Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis: cujus imperium super humerum ejus.*

the Ruler, is come, and the kingdom is in His hand, and power, and empire" (Mal. 3:1; 1 Chron. 29:12).¹⁶⁸ That is what we sing on Epiphany. And it is the same thing at Easter, at the Ascension, on all the great feastdays of our Lord. The kingdom of our Lord, His almighty power, have been proclaimed by the Church throughout the centuries.¹⁶⁹

The royalty of our Lord Jesus Christ was proclaimed already in the Old Testament. Jesus Himself declared that He was king, as we have just seen, and all of the Apostles and all those who came after them proclaimed it as well.

Not only the successors of the Apostles, but even the princes of Christian nations considered themselves the lieutenants of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁰ They were simply standing in place of our Lord Jesus Christ to govern the nations in the age of Christendom, in the age of Christian Europe.¹⁷¹

2. *Jesus: King of individuals*

If our Lord Jesus Christ is truly our King, you have to take to heart that He be also the king of your intellect. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth. He does not only give us truth, He is Truth. Consequently, to receive our Lord Jesus Christ in your intellect is to receive the light of the truth and, by the light, the faith also. So submit your intellect to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the truths of the faith.

That is what the modern world refuses to do. It will not be told to believe in truths that do not come from its own conscience, from its own intellect.

You need to submit your will, also, by abandoning yourselves totally to our Lord Jesus Christ, by applying His law, by practicing His virtues.

Finally, submit your hearts, as well, by having no other affection, no other desire for union except with our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁶⁸ Introit of the Mass of Epiphany: *Ecce advenit Dominator Dominus: et regnum ejus, et potestas et imperium.*

¹⁶⁹ Sermon, Ecône, October 30, 1977.

¹⁷⁰ See Pius XI, *Quas Primas*: Governors "rule, not by their own right, but by the mandate and in the place of the Divine King."

¹⁷¹ Sermon, Ecône, October 31, 1976.

That is what makes the true Catholic.

So, be attached to our Lord. Espouse His interests. May you always be asking yourself: "What does our Lord want of me? What are the truths I should be spreading in the place I'm in now? What love should I be spreading in the place I'm in now?"¹⁷²

3. *Jesus: King of cities*

When we read Holy Scripture, we see that, during the forty days which our Lord spent with His Apostles between His Resurrection and the Ascension, He speaks to them only of the *regnum Dei*, of the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) - of His own Kingdom, since He is God. He presses the Apostles to establish the reign of God in the world, in souls, in families, in societies, everywhere, in order to prepare that eternal kingdom.¹⁷³

As knowledge of our Lord increases, so also increase this sentiment and this conviction that Jesus has to be our King. "*He must reign*" (1 Cor. 15:25). He must reign over us first, and then He must reign everywhere. Already if we were truly convinced of that and if we lived by it, then we would very often have another judgment, a Christian judgment, concerning events and concerning everything around us.¹⁷⁴

Christendom is society living in the shadow of the cross, the shadow of the parish church built in the form of a cross, a cross on the steeple, sheltering the altar of Calvary daily renewed, where souls come to be born to grace and where they foster that grace, by the ministry of priests, who are other Christs. Christendom is the village - it is villages, cities, countries fulfilling the law of love in imitation of Christ on the cross, under the influence of the Christian life of grace. Christendom is the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; the authorities of that Christendom call themselves "lieutenants of Jesus Christ," responsible for applying His law, for protecting faith in Jesus Christ and helping its development by every possible means, in full harmony with the Church. We can say in truth that all the benefits of Christendom come from the cross of

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 6th conference.

¹⁷⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 8, 1987.

Jesus and from Jesus crucified; it is a resurrection of fallen humanity, by the virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁵

Yet if we happen to mention that, for a thousand years of Christendom, our Lord Jesus Christ truly reigned over peoples and over populations, we are dismissed as unenlightened. People take us for mentally paralyzed, unable to get beyond the Middle Ages. We are still living in the so-called Dark Ages.¹⁷⁶

And yet God really did reign throughout the centuries of Christendom. Our Lord was truly the King in cities, in families, in individuals... Oh, of course, not everything was perfect. There were definitely sinners, but we can say that the Kingdom of our Lord was accepted by all: by those who presided over the destiny of cities; by heads of families, who had no qualms in consecrating their profession to a saint; and by individuals in general.¹⁷⁷

Certain souls were so attracted by the desire to know God, to live with Him, that they withdrew into the desert, into convents, into monasteries, into the religious life. And among the laity there were exemplary families who really lived a fervent Christian life. Prayers were said as a family. They had a devotion to the most Blessed Virgin Mary. They lived their Christian life to the full and so they held as less important the things of nature, created things, material things.¹⁷⁸

There was at that time a spirit of dependence, of simplicity, of discretion, of humility in the home. Families had great numbers of vocations, because people felt the need to go to the doctor of souls, they sensed that constant call to go to our Lord Jesus Christ, to be dependent on Him.¹⁷⁹

4. *The refusal of the reign of Jesus*

But we see that as soon as Jesus appeared here below, the great ones of this world began to worry. If Jesus Christ is King, is He not a threat to our authority, to our power, to our own kingdoms? Yes indeed, He is a threat to the princes of this world if the princes do not submit to His laws, for He is the King of kings. But

¹⁷⁵ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 60; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁶ Sermon, Ecône, October 31, 1976.

¹⁷⁷ Sermon, Ecône, May 25, 1985.

¹⁷⁸ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1975.

¹⁷⁹ Spiritual conference, St. Nicolas, December 13, 1984.

we sing it on Christmas night: “*The kings of the earth and the princes have risen up against God and against His Christ*” (Ps. 2:2). And God knows that history would only confirm the truth of that verse of Scripture.

Is it possible that men rise up against Him who wants only to redeem them; against Him who comes only to bring them life; against Him who comes only to shed His blood in order to give them eternal life?

Alas! We can see it all around us. Where today are the princes of nations who kneel before the Eucharist? Where are those who come to kneel before the infant Jesus? How painful it is to think that after two thousand years of Christianity, of preaching of the Gospel, the word of Scripture is still just as true: “*The kings of the earth and the princes have risen up against God and against His Christ.*”¹⁸⁰

Satan came to trouble this reign of our Lord, and not only trouble it, but his goal was utterly to destroy it. That is exactly what Pope Leo XIII says in his encyclical *Humanum Genus*, talking about freemasonry. He says that their goal is the total destruction of Christian institutions.¹⁸¹ And indeed, patiently, resolutely, year by year, with consummate malice, they are little by little reaching their goal.

The great means of achieving the destruction of Christian institutions and of the reign of our Lord is laicism and the secularization of States, of societies – and by the very fact the secularization, the laicization of families: it has to be a logical consequence; we might say it is inevitable. And not only families, but seminaries, the clergy. Within the Church herself we have clerics speaking out in favor of secularization.

Vatican II, by its decree on religious liberty, practically establishes laicization and officially admits non-confessional States and

¹⁸⁰ Sermon, Ecône, December 25, 1976.

¹⁸¹ The freemasons are “no longer making any secret of their purposes... They are planning the destruction of holy Church publicly and openly, and this with the set purpose of utterly despoiling the nations of Christendom, if it were possible, of the blessings obtained for us through Jesus Christ our Saviour... Their ultimate purpose [is] the utter overthrow of that whole religious and political order of the world which the Christian teaching has produced...” (Leo XIII, *Humanum Genus*, §2 and 10).

secularized States. So that our Lord Jesus Christ might no longer reign in society. At most, He may reign in souls, in individuals, in families, in parishes, but no longer in society – it's not possible. I have heard it with my own ears: The reign of our Lord in society is no longer possible.

That is not what Pope Pius XI said in his encyclical *Quas Primas* on the social kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a magnificent encyclical! We need to read it and re-read it often in order to realize what our duty is, the duty of priests, in favor of the social reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we are seeing the de-Christianization of all Catholic societies, at the instigation of this Council and of this decree on religious liberty, being carried out not just with the permission of Rome, but with the approval and at the instigation of Rome.

All of the reforms which were made after the Council were made with a view to the secularization and the laicization of Catholic society. It is a crime against our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the situation we are in today.¹⁸²

You see today in what slight regard have been held the religious life and the life of the Christian family; it has reached the point now that the only concern we are supposed to have is for human values, for the values of our reason, the values of science. At the origin of that new focus is a disdain for the supernatural, a negation of the grace of God, a negation of everything that our Lord came to bring us. By insisting so much on human values, on the values of this world, on the values of science, we end up denying our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸³

One of the most painful things we have to be aware of today is precisely that official negation of the social kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ. People no longer want our Lord Jesus Christ to reign over societies. It is even written into the transformation of the liturgy. They removed from the hymn for the feast of Christ the King the two stanzas that speak of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ over the family and over society. And why is that? Are we Catholics going to start denying the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ over our families and over our societies? We would be traitors!

¹⁸² Sermon, Ecône, May 25, 1985.

¹⁸³ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1975.

We would be apostates!¹⁸⁴

It is not only when He comes on the clouds of Heaven that He will be our King. The feast of Christ the King has been pushed back to the end of the month of November, perhaps to imply that Jesus Christ will be our king at the end of time, when He comes on the clouds of Heaven, but He will not be our king on this earth.

But we say, "Yes, already on this earth, our Lord Jesus Christ is our king; He is our king today; He must be our King tomorrow; He must be our king always." It is the only solution for nations to obtain peace, fraternity, justice, holiness, and to obtain Heaven. There is no other solution.

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 a question of rebuilding Christian civilization. If only the world could understand that our Lord Jesus Christ, even today, can and must be our king.¹⁸⁵

So what should we do in the present situation, faced with this world that rejects our Lord Jesus Christ, that does not want to believe in His divinity? We have to affirm the divinity and the royalty of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁶

Even to our last breath, we will proclaim that our Lord Jesus Christ is our only King. There is no other, nor will there be any other in Heaven.

We therefore have to do what is in our power so that our Lord Jesus Christ might reign over societies, reign over families, reign over individuals. That is the role of the priest, it is the role of Christian families, it is the role of all those who believe in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1977.

¹⁸⁵ Sermon, Ecône, October 31, 1976; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 308.

¹⁸⁶ Sermon, Ecône, December 25, 1976.

¹⁸⁷ Sermon, Ecône, October 31, 1976.

5. To restore all things in Christ

St. Paul affirms that we must restore all things, establish all things in Christ (*Eph. 1:10*). St. John Chrysostom says that the expression *instaurare* means *to tie together*.¹⁸⁸

St. Paul continues, “*God wishes to reunite all things in Christ, both the things of heaven and the things of the earth*” (*cf. Eph. 1:10*). In order really to underline that universal application, St. Paul distinguishes the two parts of the world, heaven and earth, and all that each contains, giving emphasis by repeating the preposition.

It is a tremendous reality, obviously, and one that shows the importance which God gives to the work which His Son accomplished for us, not only by the Redemption, but also in Creation, by all that He made. All things were made in Christ; all things are made to be reunited to God by and through Christ.¹⁸⁹

That is why we long for the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. We say it every day in the *Pater*, “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*” (*Mt. 6:10*). Are we going to deny our *Pater Noster*? We want our Lord Jesus Christ to reign, for it is He who will bring happiness, true happiness, true justice, true peace, true charity, real union among all men. Only our Lord Jesus Christ is the ferment of that charity. To the extent that we move away from Him, dissensions arise, and hatred, and divisions, and war. We need that kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁰

So we must not give in to discouragement, nor slacken in the combat we are waging in order to contribute, on our level but with all our strength, to the reestablishment of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ over hearts, over souls, over families, over nations; thus may Christian civilization be restored.¹⁹¹

Christian civilization is the fruit of natural virtues and also of supernatural virtues, in the sense that the supernatural virtues overflow onto our nature. For example, politeness, kindness, amiability, all of those things are natural virtues but they are perfected by grace. That is why Christian civilization is a very beautiful

¹⁸⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *1st Sermon on the Epistle to the Ephesians*.

¹⁸⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 29, 1980.

¹⁹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1977.

¹⁹¹ *C'est Moi, l'Accusé, Qui Devrais Vous Juger*, p. 250; *cf. Against the Heresies*, p. 241.

thing, because it reestablishes in society all of the social virtues that make it pleasant to be there.¹⁹²

It's a whole fabric of Christian social life, Christian customs, Christian reflexes, which we have to restore, on the scale that God wills, taking as long as God wills. All that I know – and it's the faith that teaches it – is that our Lord Jesus Christ must reign here below, now, and not just at the end of the world, as the liberals would have it!¹⁹³

We have the duty to make our Lord king everywhere. His reign cannot be limited to the family. We must not imagine that, as soon as we leave the family environment, what we do in our profession or in politics does not concern Him. That is false! We have to be subject to our Lord always, in all that we do, and consequently that includes the activities of our profession and whatever concerns our region, the good of our village, the good of our city, the good of our nation. It is high time for true Catholics to wake up to the situation around them, which is getting worse every month, worse every year. There are still people in our country who have the faith. We need to rally them together, we need to wake them up. Those with deep Catholic convictions need to take on responsibilities.

Catholics are afraid of taking an involvement in public office. They would be right to be afraid, of course, if they were going to be forced to participate in something evil. But if they are involving themselves on the contrary in order to prevent evil things from happening, then they have to step forward. They have to take on responsibilities for the good of souls, to bring about the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ within legislation.

It seems to me that there is a failure in that domain and perhaps a lack of understanding of the duty that faithful Catholics really have. In villages where eighty percent are Catholic and where people still have convictions, good Catholics need to be the ones who direct the village, who take on regional offices. It is not about party politics, but simply about pursuing the social kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

¹⁹³ *Ils L'ont Découronné*, p. 250; cf. *They Have Uncrowned Him*, p. 251.

¹⁹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, October 30, 1988.

You who are heads of families have a serious responsibility in your country. You do not have the right to allow your country to be invaded by socialism and communism. You do not have the right, or you are no longer Catholics. You need to battle during the elections in order to have Catholic mayors, Catholic representatives, and ultimately that France become Catholic again.¹⁹⁵

And so, you will reestablish order in your family and in society so that Jesus might be the King of the world as He desires, and so that His will might be done on earth as in Heaven, and not in Heaven only.¹⁹⁶

7. A FINAL CONSIDERATION OF THE PERSON OF JESUS

Before leaving the Person of Jesus Christ and trying next to understand His redemptive work of salvation, let us try to mark indelibly on our minds the real and living image of Jesus, who has to illuminate and orient all of our life.

Here is that picture, in the words of Fr. Pègues:

“Yes! When one says Jesus Christ, one indicates the only Son of God, who, being from all eternity with His Father and the Holy Spirit the same, one and only True God, by whom all things were created and who sustains them and governs them as Sovereign Master, within time took on Himself our human nature, by reason of which He is truly man like us, but yet continues to be with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the same God that He is from all eternity. Consequently He has in His human nature, and is assured of having inasmuch as He is a man like us, privileges of grace in a certain way infinite. First of all shines His quality as Savior of mankind, which constitutes Him, as man, unique Mediator between God and men, Sovereign Priest, Supreme King, Prophet without equal and Head of all the assembly of the elect, angels and men, forming His true Mystical Body.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Sermon, Paris, September 23, 1979.

¹⁹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1987.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Pègues, O.P., *La Somme Théologique de Saint Thomas d'Aquin en Forme de Catéchisme pour Tous les Fidèles (The Catechism of the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas for the Use of the Faithful)*, Pierre Téqui, Paris, 1919, in *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 55; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 40-41.

4.

THE MYSTERY OF THE REDEMPTION

1. THE MOTIVE OF CREATION AND THE INCARNATION

What was the end for which God created all things? It is the great mystery of the Redemption of our souls by our Lord Jesus Christ. By this mystery, our souls have been transformed, divinized, and they will be able to dwell in the Holy Trinity for all eternity. All things have been ordained to the mystery of the Redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ, in our Lord Jesus Christ, with our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the end for which God created the world and for which He holds it in life.¹⁹⁸

The very reason for the Incarnation of our Lord, the reason for His death on the cross, for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, for the foundation of the Church, for the institution of the priesthood, is the redemption of our sins. If we had never sinned, we would still have had supernatural life. And thus our Lord would not have needed to come to earth to give it back to us. *Propter nostram salutem, descendit de cælis*, we sing in the *Credo*. It was for our salvation that He came down from heaven and that He died on the cross.¹⁹⁹

Men are sinners; our Lord came down to earth and died on the cross to redeem them, to give them back the life which they had lost through sin.²⁰⁰

Our Lord came to redeem us, to pay the debt which we had contracted, not only by the sin of our first parents but also by all of our personal sins.²⁰¹ We had separated ourselves from God. In

¹⁹⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 23, 1977.

¹⁹⁹ St. Thomas writes, "Hence, since everywhere in the Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason of Incarnation, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of Incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy for sin; so that, had sin not existed, the Incarnation would not have been" (*Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 1, a. 3).

²⁰⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

²⁰¹ The debt due to God by our sins is twofold: the fault, which is the turning away from God caused by mortal sin or a slighter turning away caused by venial sin, and the pain, which is the expiation of the disordered attachment

order to come back into communion with Him, only the blood of a God could have reestablished the balance. Even if we had been crucified for our own sins, we would not have been able to reestablish that bridge between humanity and God, because if we have the misfortune of committing a mortal sin, that offense we give God has a certain character of infinity, since it is God whom we insult, it is God from whom we separate ourselves – God, who has an infinite honor, an infinite glory. In order to make up for that offense, in some way it had to be truly God Himself who gave Himself, who offered Himself as victim.²⁰²

God made that extraordinary decision, that inconceivable decision, to say, “It is I who will bear the sins of men. It is I who will bear their sins. I am going to become man, I am going to become one of them, I am going to die to reestablish justice toward My Father. And all those who join Me will be saved; those who refuse will be damned.”²⁰³

The Word of God therefore became incarnate because of the sin of man, to make reparation for it and thereby give a new birth to the divine life in souls, so that they might be once again agreeable to God, glorify Him in this world and for eternity.

So Jesus, in His merciful love, willed to take on Himself in a certain way the sins of humanity and to offer Himself in a sacrifice of redemption and propitiation to His Father, to restore the life of the Holy Spirit, the life of charity, in souls, by a participation in His own life, now the only source of life and salvation for men. The sacrifice of Calvary thus appears as the light which shines in the darkness, as the one fountain of life in the midst of the desert.²⁰⁴

2. THE WORD “REDEMPTION”

“In our Lord we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which the Father has poured in abundance on us in all wisdom and prudence” (cf. Eph. 1:7-8).

to the creature.

²⁰² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 3rd conference.

²⁰³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 3rd conference.

²⁰⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 57; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 42.

The word *redemption*, etymologically, means a buying back, the deliverance of a captive through ransom. It is important for us to meditate on this term, considering the importance it has for our salvation.²⁰⁵ It is truly by the mystery of the Redemption that we are saved.

Unfortunately, today people have a disdain for this idea of redemption, this deliverance through a buying back, and especially through the ransom that is the blood of our Lord. They claim that when we use that language, we make it as though God were thirsty for the blood of His Son. In reality, when we say that the Father sent His Son to redeem us, we do not mean that the Father was thirsty for the blood of His Son, but that He willed that the Redemption be accomplished by His sacrifice, by the shedding of His blood.²⁰⁶

The expression “ransom by the blood of Jesus” indicates very well that Jesus offers Himself as the price of our buying back. How many lessons are in this one word *redemption*: the slavery of the sinner and his helplessness, contrasted with the love of Christ giving His life for him; the sacrificial and expiatory character of the death of Jesus; the infinite value of His blood...²⁰⁷

3. THE PASSION OF JESUS: THE PERFECT SOLUTION

All of the Old Testament was preparing the sacrifice of our Lord: the lamb immolated before the flight out of Egypt and the blood applied to the lintel of the doors of the Hebrews’ houses to spare them from death by the exterminating angel;²⁰⁸ the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham; all of those sacrifices took place as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of our Lord. They were figures of the greatest event which could ever occur in the history of humanity: the bodily death of the Creator of the entire universe.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 48, a. 4.

²⁰⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 47, a. 3.

²⁰⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 29, 1980.

²⁰⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 102, a. 5, *ad* 2.

²⁰⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 10th conference.

1. *The mystery of the cross*

God decided that the Word would become incarnate, and we could have imagined Him coming on the clouds of Heaven as our Lord will come in glory at the end of time, or perhaps as He was on Mount Tabor, radiant with glory. Those seem like ways our Lord should have come into this world. He should have come without even passing through the womb of a woman, without having an earthly mother, descending from the bosom of the Trinity surrounded by magnificence and the glorious hosts of Heaven, with displays of His power over stars, over the sun, and He would have given glory to God that way. For us, that's a little bit how we might have imagined it. The Son of God, the Creator, He who holds the universe in His hands, should have come like the King of the world, like the Prince of the world, with a whole outward spectacle to manifest His glory.

Not at all. God chose something truly mysterious. Instead of that absolutely magnificent spectacle in which our Lord could have come, His spectacle was the cross. Does that make any sense at all? This mystery of which St. Paul speaks, the *mysterium crucis* (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:7), the *mysterium Christi* (Col. 4:3), is truly a deep, deep, deep mystery. The manner of the Incarnation is already a mystery, certainly, by the fact that our Lord chose the womb of a simple woman to come here below. He wished to be born humbly in Bethlehem, of Mary. And after the Incarnation there had to be the Redemption in order for our Lord to take the cross as His throne of glory. A tremendous thing, obviously, which is beyond our comprehension; which is a true mystery!²¹⁰

We can't help being struck by how often our Lord returns to this idea of His "hour," over the course of His whole life on earth. *Desiderio desideravi*, said our Lord: "I have desired with a great desire this hour of My immolation" (cf. Lk. 22:15). Jesus yearned for His cross. The *mysterium Christi* is above all the *mysterium crucis*. That is why, in the designs of the infinite wisdom of God for the accomplishment of the Redemption, of the re-creation, of the renovation of humanity, the cross of Jesus is the perfect solution, the total, definitive, eternal solution, by which all things would be resolved.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1980.

²¹¹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 59; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 44.

2. *The sufferings of Jesus*

The Passion of our Lord is a great mystery. After the Last Supper, Jesus goes to the Garden of Olives. And there His incredible, extraordinary Passion begins: God suffering, God who seems crushed by the sorrow, by the sacrifice! His blood already flows at the mere thought of His sacrifice, and at the thought that many people, unfortunately, would never even understand His sacrifice.²¹²

As St. Thomas says, no one suffered as much as our Lord.²¹³ No martyr suffered as much as He because we must not consider only the physical sufferings, we have to see the moral sufferings as well. When we think about the fact that our Lord had a perfect nature and therefore one that was extremely sensitive, a heart that could not be more loving and so which could not be more attached to those whom He loved, we understand that there could be no creature which suffered more than He. For in the Garden of Olives He had before His eyes all the sins of men, He was carrying all their sins.²¹⁴ Imagine, in all the history of humanity, how many sins there could be, and so how many rejections of God, oppositions to the charity which God placed in men. Our Lord saw all of the greatest, most beautiful things which God gave to men – not only existence, but also participation in His nature – trampled underfoot, disdained by so many souls. St. Catherine of Siena had a vision of the soul of a prelate who was in sin and she suffered acutely at the sight. If she suffered so acutely simply at seeing the soul of one prelate in sin, imagine what our Lord must have suffered, He who saw during His agony all the sins of men of the entire world, in their least detail. It is something that made Him suffer horribly, even more than the physical sufferings.²¹⁵

This sight which passed before the mind of our Lord during His agony, of all personal sins spread over all of history and throughout the world, was the consequence of the sin of the angels, because it truly is on account of their sin that Adam and Eve sinned as well. And this sight was also the consequence of the sin of our first parents. This vision caused our Lord a sweat of blood

²¹² Sermon, Ecône, April 16, 1987.

²¹³ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 46, a. 6.

²¹⁴ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 46, a. 6, *ad* 4.

²¹⁵ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 20, 1978, 7th conference.

and made drops of blood trickle down His face. We should have that image before our eyes and beg God not to allow us, too, to be part of that sin and increase the horror of that terrible vision.²¹⁶

There is also the mystery of the humiliations: Jesus Christ humiliated by the chief priests, humiliated by the betrayal of Judas, humiliated by the ill treatments, the shameful treatments which He suffered from His brothers and from the Romans. And then the way of the cross, the arrival at Calvary, the crucifixion.

What sorrows, what sufferings, what humiliations! Let us participate fully in this mystery.²¹⁷

How do we see our Lord on the cross? We find Him bloody, torn by the blows of the lashes received during the flagellation, crowned with thorns, His heart pierced by the lance, His hands pierced by the nails, His feet as well, His knees certainly bloodied by the three times He fell carrying the cross. Our Lord is therefore in a state of victim, in a state of indescribable pain.²¹⁸

However, beyond that pain, we should perceive also the immense joy of our Lord Jesus Christ at the thought that He is reestablishing the honor and the glory of His Father. Henceforth humanity in His person reestablishes the bridge, the link with God, with the Holy Trinity. Perfect glory, total, complete glory, is rendered to God by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Could anyone in a human soul and body render greater glory to God, so entirely that, even if all men had fallen into hell, the rights of God would still have been reestablished?

Our Lord, behind His sufferings, behind the blood that flows, still has the beatific vision and so gives glory to God. It is another great mystery.²¹⁹

3. *The moral virtues and the cross of Jesus*

In considering Jesus in His Passion, what strikes us first is His sufferings. But it is good to consider also the virtues practiced by Him in the midst of the most painful tor-

²¹⁶ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1985, 4th conference.

²¹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, April 16, 1987.

²¹⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 3rd conference.

²¹⁹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 46, a. 8. Sermon, Ecône, April 16, 1987.

ments. On the cross, Jesus exercises the virtues of prudence, of justice, of fortitude, and of temperance.

The cross of Jesus displays the wisdom of God, gives glory to the Father and reveals the love of Jesus for His neighbor. His death on the cross is therefore the act of prudence *par excellence*.

The cross of Jesus is also an act of justice, since it renders to God what is due to Him, namely, perfect, total love. No one has performed a greater act of love for His neighbor than did our Lord.²²⁰

Was there ever a greater act of fortitude than that of our Lord on the cross? Martyrdom is the greatest act of fortitude there is, and our Lord suffered the most sublime martyrdom. He is the King of Martyrs. He showed His perseverance even unto death in His love for God and for neighbor, whereas the world is weak, it flies from sorrow and will deny God rather than suffer. And so our Lord conquered our weakness by the cross.

Our Lord, who is the rich man *par excellence*, rich by nature, since He has all heaven and earth at His disposal, defeated our concupiscence by His poverty. He was poor in every manner possible, even to His death. Could He have died in more poverty than on the cross? He died in poverty, poor in the affection of His Apostles who abandoned Him. He died poor in His goods. They took even His clothing, they cast lots for His tunic. In that way He also carried off the victory over the spirit of selfishness, of desire for the riches of this world. And so by the cross, our Lord conquered that spirit of the world which makes us forget the goods of Heaven by attaching us too much to the goods of the earth.

Finally, has there ever been a greater act of humility than that of our Lord on the cross? Dying on a cross at that time was the most ignominious and the most shameful death. The cross was considered a spectacle of infamy. What is more, our Lord was crucified between two thieves. That is a profound humiliation. And so He was victorious over the pride of the world; our pride was conquered by His cross.

As for us, we ought to have that desire to imitate our Lord, that desire to be victims on the cross like Him. We have to ask our

²²⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1978, 4th conference.

Lord and the Blessed Virgin for that grace of detachment.²²¹

4. *The Passion reveals the gravity of sin*

Certainly, since God is all-powerful, He could have chosen another means to save us. He could have done it without dying on the cross, since all of His acts had an infinite value. He could simply have prayed with us. His prayer all by itself would have sufficed to reestablish relations with God. But our Lord willed to suffer and die in order to show us the horror, the abomination and the gravity of our sin. We need to remind ourselves of that often. We need to see the reality of our sin by meditating on the sufferings endured by our Lord on the cross.²²²

The death of Jesus on the cross is a continual lesson to remind us of the gravity of sin. God judged that He should die in suffering, in undergoing the torture of the scourging, in having His heart opened by the lance... to show us all the malice of sin, and at the same time His immense mercy toward us.²²³

5. *The Passion reveals the charity of God*

Since what is most beautiful and most great in the Holy Trinity is charity, how could our Lord most fully manifest to us His charity? Was it by coming in His glory, in His almighty power, surrounded by the angels and archangels, by all the power of Heaven and earth, all the kings of the earth rendering Him homage? Was it in that way that our Lord would have best manifested His charity toward His Father and toward men, toward His neighbor? Well, apparently not, since God chose another means, and it is by His death, by His blood, by the total gift of Himself that He manifested His love for us.²²⁴

Our Lord gave all His blood, all His life to redeem us and "*greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for those he loves*" (Jn. 15:13).²²⁵

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 3rd conference.

²²³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 4th conference.

²²⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1980.

²²⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1978, 4th conference.

How our Lord draws our love as He appears there, torn by the scourging and by the entire crucifixion! *Omnis enim figura ejus spirat amorem*,²²⁶ His whole aspect, His whole image breathes love, breathes charity.²²⁷

Charity is none other than that gift of self. And our Lord chose the cross, chose to give Himself totally that He might Himself reestablish that circuit of charity which had been broken by sin. God saw that souls would regain a much greater depth of sentiment, a greater depth of charity, by the total gift of our Lord Jesus Christ than if they had been overwhelmed by the power of our Lord, by His gifts, by His glory.²²⁸ The fact that Jesus Christ, Son of God, gave His blood for us, ought to produce in souls, and particularly in the souls of the elite, in the souls of saints, much nobler sentiments of charity than if He had merely displayed His glory in a great outward spectacle, to make us share in His divine life.²²⁹

6. *Mary: Co-Redemptrix by charity*

Our Lord gave His last breath for the glory of His Father and for the redemption of souls, so that the Holy Spirit might enflame all hearts and all souls with love of the most Holy Trinity; and the most Blessed Virgin Mary, though she did not die at that instant, also offered her life and suffered martyrdom, since she is called the Queen of Martyrs.²³⁰

During the Passion, the most Blessed Virgin became the Queen of Martyrs, the Mother of Sorrows. As the heart of our Lord was opened, hers also was pierced by a sword, as the old man Simeon had foretold to her, "*A sword shall pierce thy heart*" (Lk. 2:35). The most Blessed Virgin certainly suffered a very great pain at seeing her Son in the state He was left in by the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the piercing of His hands and feet, the lance driven into His heart.²³¹

²²⁶ Excerpt from a hymn of the old office for the feast of the Seven Sorrows of our Lady.

²²⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 22, 1984, 1st conference.

²²⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 46, a. 3.

²²⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1980.

²³⁰ Sermon, Ecône, April 10, 1981.

²³¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 27, 1984, 12th conference.

So it is that she, too, gave to God all of her blood, all of her life, all that she had, and in particular her divine Son, for the redemption of souls: Mother of Mercy, *Mater Misericordiae*.

It is obvious that charity is the deepest motive behind the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and behind the Compassion of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.

Their hearts were burning with charity. Our Lord, Word of God, consubstantially united to the Holy Spirit, was devoured by the love of the Holy Spirit, who enflamed His entire being. The Person of the Word, but also His soul and His body and His heart of flesh were on fire with the Holy Spirit.

And the Virgin Mary imitated her divine Son. She, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit. All her effort was to model her sentiments on those of her divine Son.

So these two hearts set on fire by the Holy Spirit had above all, as their main goal, the love of the Father – we must not forget that. For the love of the Holy Spirit, that consuming fire, always leads to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the name for that Love who is God. So all He can do, ever, is carry us toward God, carry us toward the Father. It was therefore primarily to reestablish the honor of God, the honor of the Father, that Jesus suffered. And the Virgin Mary also. She united herself to that suffering of her divine Son in order to reestablish the honor of the Father. Thus the Father received an infinite glory from His divine Son and He received a very great glory from the most Blessed Virgin Mary, united to her divine Son.

Charity brings joy and peace. Consequently, as unbelievable as it may appear, the heart of our Lord and the heart of the Virgin Mary were overflowing with joy and with an ineffable peace during the Passion. Jesus and Mary were not in torment the way those who suffer in their bodies very often are, unfortunately, with sentiments of profound sadness and despair. That is not the way Jesus and Mary suffered.

They suffered, but their heart was fully in serenity, in peace, which is what allowed the most Blessed Virgin Mary to remain standing at the foot of the cross. If the Blessed Virgin had not had that charity, that intimate and profound joy of associating herself with the sufferings of her divine Son, if she had not had that

peace, she would not have remained standing. The Gospel would not have said, *Stabat Mater* (cf. *Jn.* 19:25).²³²

We would perhaps have been distraught like the pious women who surrounded the Blessed Virgin, who were fainting with sorrow at the foot of the cross, who were weeping to see our Lord in such a state. The most Blessed Virgin was more noble, she saw things on a higher level. She did not only see externals, she also saw the interior of our Lord, His soul, His divinity, His radiant glory. She knew that He was there for the salvation of the world. So she, too, thought of the salvation of the world and she likewise thought of all the souls who would not benefit from His Passion, who would abandon Him, who would not follow Him.

That is what the most Blessed Virgin was thinking at the foot of the cross. So let us ask the most Blessed Virgin to help us truly to meditate on the lessons of the crucifix.²³³

4. THE RESURRECTION

Our Lord Himself said before breathing His last, “*All is consummated*” (*Jn.* 19:30). All is finished, all is consummated. Our Lord had then completed the Redemption.

Then would follow consequences: the Resurrection, the Ascension, His glorification. And finally the work of applying the merits of the cross, applying the merits of the Redemption to souls by the sacrifice of the holy Mass and by the sacraments.²³⁴

Christ is risen. We believe it with all our soul and with all our heart. There are many Catholics today who actually hesitate over the reality of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to them, our Lord did not take back up the body which He had received from the Virgin Mary, the body which had been crucified.

Yet our Lord Himself allowed there to be an unbeliever among the Apostles, in order to respond to those errors in advance. St. Thomas refused to believe in the reality of His Resurrec-

²³² Sermon, Ecône, April 10, 1981.

²³³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 22, 1984, 1st conference.

²³⁴ Retreat, le Barroux, August 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 42-43.

tion. So our Lord came up to him and told him, “*Thomas, place your finger in My wounds*” (cf. *Jn. 20:27*).

After that, are we going to doubt that our Lord rose again with the same body with which He had been crucified and which He had received from the most Blessed Virgin Mary?²³⁵ For us, it is our faith, and we have no desire to change it. It is clear that this Resurrection of our Lord is an irrefutable argument for His divinity.²³⁶

The power to raise oneself from the dead, as our Lord did, can only belong to God.²³⁷ Only God could raise again His own body, which He had taken to become incarnate and dwell among us. The Resurrection of our Lord therefore manifests the almighty power of God.²³⁸

Today we are affirming with the Church of all time that Jesus rose again with the body with which He was crucified. May His glorious wounds maintain us in that faith!

One day, with the grace of God, we shall see the glorious wounds of our Lord, by which we were redeemed. Thanks to them, we will be able to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary to maintain us in this faith. Could she ever say that the body with which our Lord Jesus Christ rose again is not the one she gave Him? She was the witness of the crucifixion of her divine Son, she followed Him all the way to the tomb and she is very certain that the body which He took back up is indeed the one she gave Him. She saw Him herself more than once between His Resurrection and His Ascension.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary to maintain us in the Catholic faith, in the faith of the Church, and not let us be led astray by the modern errors which would draw us away from our Lord Jesus Christ and which would threaten to separate us from Him forever.²³⁹

²³⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 54, a. 1.

²³⁶ Sermon, Ecône, April 11, 1982.

²³⁷ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 53, a. 4.

²³⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 6th conference.

²³⁹ Sermon, Ecône, April 11, 1982.

5. THE FRUITS OF THE PASSION AND THE RESURRECTION

The first effect of the Redemption is the pardon of all sins.²⁴⁰ With that forgiveness, God also pours over us the treasures of His grace.²⁴¹

Our Lord willed by His death to deliver us from our sins and by His Resurrection to re-enliven our souls to the grace of God.²⁴² The entire ceremony of the Easter Vigil expresses it. Admirable is the ceremony of the blessing of the Pascal candle, which symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ Himself illuminating the world once more; as is the blessing of the baptismal water, which signifies the resurrection of our souls in contact with the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ. As St. John says, “*of His plenitude we have all received, and grace upon grace*” (Jn. 1:16).²⁴³

Thus, our Lord rose again in order to allow us to participate in His glory and to communicate to us as well all the fruits of His Passion: sanctifying grace and the Holy Spirit by the sacrifice of the Mass and by the sacraments.²⁴⁴

But can we say that henceforth we are risen forever like our Lord? Not at all, our body has not risen, we know very well that we must die. We have not yet reached the end of this resurrection. The grace which is given in baptism is a pledge, a seed of this resurrection, but it must germinate, develop, grow until our death. Our soul is like a little boat on the tossing sea that is our flesh, that sinful flesh which has to die because it is still a vessel of sin. Yes, in spite of the grace of baptism, we carry in ourselves a tendency to sin, a fundamental disorder. The best proof is that baptized parents who live in full conformity with the law of God nonetheless communicate original sin to their children. This flesh is therefore still infested with the consequences of original sin, which is why it must die, and one day it will rise again, glorious we hope, precisely in contact with our sanctified souls, resurrected to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. But already our souls are resurrect-

²⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 49, a. 1.

²⁴¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 29, 1980.

²⁴² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 56, a. 2.

²⁴³ Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 43.

²⁴⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 22, 1984, 1st conference.

ed, if Jesus is truly present in us and if our souls are purified of sin.²⁴⁵

6. MAN'S RECEPTION OF GOD'S MERCY

By His Passion, Jesus Christ shed His blood for the salvation of men. Yet in order to benefit from the graces which He merited for them, they would have to believe in Him and be subject to Him. Archbishop Lefebvre shows how certain men would love Him and adhere to His desire to save them, while others would refuse to obey, despite so many proofs of love.

God has revealed His mercy: it is a simple fact. The whole life of our Lord and particularly the Passion are a manifestation of mercy. The question now is how souls are going to react to it.

The Gospel already shows us. There are those who do not hesitate to come before the doctor of their soul to ask Him forgiveness of their sins and ask Him for graces, for the gifts of His mercy so they might be saved. And then, sadly, there are others who refuse. It is an obvious fact in the Gospel. There are souls who benefit from the mercy which God grants them, and then there are those who resist it.

Still today, faced with the charity of God, souls do convert, come to love God and follow Him, and others refuse to follow Him. God has given us freedom and He asks us to adhere to that desire which He has to save us. So there are those who freely adhere, who give their consent to that call of God, and others who refuse it. It is certainly a very grave mystery. So we need to ask God that we be truly chosen and that we be faithful to that choice. We have to give our consent to the plan of God for us, for on that plan does our entire life depend.

Unfortunately, even after we have given our consent, we can go back on it. That is why we have to ask for perseverance in our submission to the will of God and why we have to take the means of maintaining that adherence. It is of capital importance. God offers His mercy, He offers salvation, He offers His forgiveness. On

²⁴⁵ Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 43.

His side, there is no problem.²⁴⁶ He will offer His forgiveness always, even to our last breath. But what will our response be? All of the means which our Lord has left to His Church have the same goal. The sacraments, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, His Gospel, preaching, all of those things are so many ways the mercy of our Lord is calling to us.

What is our answer? Is our answer going to be truly definitive? Is it going to be such that we hold faithful even to our last breath to that gift of ourselves we are making to God? Is that not the great question facing the soul of each one of us? And no one else can answer for us. Each man has his own responsibility before God to answer the divine call, whose source is that great charity, that mercy of God.²⁴⁷

7. THE PASSION: SOURCE OF DEVOTION

1. *Devotion to the Sacred Heart*

We always need to call upon the mercy of God, because of all our misery. If we had no misery, if we were perfect, we would not need the mercy of God. It would be enough to have His charity, His goodness. But that is not the case. That is why mercy is constantly being brought to mind in Holy Scripture. Line after line we come upon the word “mercy,” because ever since original sin all men are full of miseries. Men who still believe in God can sense this misery which pursues them because of sin and because of the consequences of sin – physical, moral, spiritual misery... Their soul turns as it were instinctively toward God and calls upon His mercy: “Kind and merciful Lord, have pity on us.” Ever since our Lord came to earth and was crucified, ever since His heart was opened with the lance, souls that are truly Christian have turned toward the merciful heart of Jesus. And there is no doubt that devotion to the Sacred Heart is above all, fundamentally, devotion to the mercy of God.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 10.

²⁴⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 2nd conference.

²⁴⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 1st conference.

2. *Devotion to the Passion and to the cross.*

We need to have a great devotion toward the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and toward His blood. It is by His blood that He saved us. St. Paul is constantly repeating it: *per sanguinem ipsius, in sanguine ejus* (Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12).

We also need to have a great devotion toward the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ because it was bathed in His blood, because it was the altar on which He immolated Himself. It is a devotion of the Church, which has been confirmed throughout the centuries by the miracles which have been worked by the cross.²⁴⁹

Throughout the history of the Church, souls wanting to deepen their Christian life have always found in the mystery of the cross the means of making their spiritual life increase. Especially in the Christian Middle Ages do we find traces of this profound devotion to the mystery of the cross. We find it in the construction of those magnificent churches and cathedrals. The cross dominates the altar. It is there at the cross-roads. Everywhere did they raise the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Angela of Foligno, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernard expressed in their writings, and I would even say in their flesh, the love which they had for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the mystery of our sanctification, the mystery of our justification, has no meaning without the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet today people want to eliminate the cross, they refuse to look at it, they refuse to have it in front of their eyes. Why? Because the cross represents sacrifice. And yet it is only by the cross, by sacrifice that the Christian soul comes back to life. Death died, says the liturgy, when He died who was the source of life.²⁵⁰ It is life that triumphed.²⁵¹

8. THE PASSION OF JESUS IN THE LITURGY

The great mystery around which all the liturgy of the Church revolves is the mystery of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. From all eternity, God willed that His Son take a body and a soul

²⁴⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 3, 1980.

²⁵⁰ *Mors mortua tunc est quando mortua vita fuit*, 1st antiphon of Lauds on Holy Saturday. See also, *O mors, ero mors tua, morsus tuus ero, inferne* (Hos. 13:14).

²⁵¹ Sermon, Ecône, September 14, 1975.

like ours, and that He shed His blood for the redemption of our sins. Great mystery! And the ceremonies of Holy Week make us relive every year these moving days of the Passion of our Lord. These days flood our soul with joy as we see our Lord working our salvation, but at the same time with sorrow faced with our reality as sinners.

This mystery unfolds as an immense combat waged between God and Satan. For the Gospel says it explicitly, Satan took possession of the soul of Judas (*Jn.* 13:27). It is therefore a combat against Satan, a combat against sin, combat against death from which God will emerge victorious. And God wants to draw us into His combat in order to participate in His victory. The merits of the Passion of our Lord will have to be applied to us so that we might participate in that victory against sin, against Satan and against death.

Today, the tendency is to forget about the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and only think about His Resurrection. People are very willing to let the crucifixes disappear and only represent our Lord triumphant. Certainly, our Lord has triumphed, but He triumphed by His Passion. His Resurrection is the result of His combat, as it were, the result of His Passion, of His blood being shed, as St. Paul so magnificently expresses it: "*He entered once for all in the Holy of Holies, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood, having obtained an eternal redemption*" (*cf.* *Heb.* 9:12).²⁵² He shed His own blood for us.

Again as St. Paul says, "*I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (*1 Cor.* 2:2), "*scandal for the Jews, folly for the Gentiles, but wisdom*" for those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ (*1 Cor.* 1:23-24). So that will be your wisdom: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁵³

The reign of our Lord Jesus Christ is therefore inconceivable without the cross. The cross is His throne, and His crown of thorns is today a crown radiant with glory. His outstretched arms are showing us the infinity of His kingdom and His open heart is showing us that He reigns by His love. That is how the faith offers our Lord Jesus Christ to us.²⁵⁴

²⁵² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 49, a. 5.

²⁵³ Sermon, Ecône, April 8, 1984.

²⁵⁴ Sermon, Ecône, October 30, 1977.

9. THE CROSS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. *The cross: Source of peace*

The sacrifice of the cross, which we venerate, which we adore, teaches us how to make peace in ourselves, for peace is the tranquility of order. The Christian order, the order of the cross, is the order which the Church has pursued throughout Her history. You will be heirs of the Church when you seek that order, when you pursue it above all in yourself, by the virtues which you practice. And also you will strive to reestablish order in your souls by receiving Jesus crucified, in the Holy Eucharist.²⁵⁵

The mystery of the Redemption determines in an even more concrete manner, more precise manner, the place which Jesus needs to hold in our spiritual life, since our Lord redeemed each one of us personally.²⁵⁶

That God Himself should have come in person in the midst of us in order to save us, and to save us by the cross, by His priesthood and by His sacrifice, ought to hold us in continual admiration, in perpetual admiration, in daily gratitude.²⁵⁷

2. *The cross: A medicinal suffering*

Throughout the history of the Church, God has sheltered His elect for the time He willed, but He also made them carry the cross. He allowed their life to be a life of sufferings. And all the Apostles died martyrs. I do not know if we, too, will die martyrs, but we always have to be ready to suffer because God asks us to. We are not here below to receive material and temporal blessings from Him, but to save our souls.²⁵⁸

St. Paul says that we have to complete in our flesh the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ (*cf. Col. 1:24*). We, too, should have that desire. Oh! it is a desire that will cost us dearly. For if we wish to complete the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will have to suffer with Him, be immolated with Him. It would be too easy to say: "Because I am a Christian, God will bless me and will exempt me

²⁵⁵ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1987.

²⁵⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 29, 1980.

²⁵⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 7th conference.

²⁵⁸ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

from all suffering. I will spend my life without suffering, without sacrifice. Because I really love God, God must love me, and therefore God will not want me to suffer." That is a failure to understand the mystery of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. If our Lord has shown us the example of redemptive suffering, we should have nearly a longing to suffer with Him, to sacrifice ourselves with Him.²⁵⁹

Suffering, which was a pain of punishment for us, something endured without hope, will then become a pain of healing, a treasure of life and salvation; it goes from being something intolerable to being something desirable, loveable, sought with ardent desire.²⁶⁰

If we asked all the saints, who sing the glory of God and of our Lord in Heaven, what was the means, the way of their sanctification during their earthly life, there is absolutely no doubt that they would answer us, "The way of sanctification is our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Lord Jesus Christ crucified." The way of perfection, the way of sanctity, is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁶¹

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 in a way become co-redeemers.

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 without being priests, were truly united to our Lord Jesus Christ because they participated in our Lord's Redemption. They participated in His Redemption by offering themselves as victims with Him on the wood of the cross, as well as by their apostolate. Therefore, in the Catholic Church, the veritable sign of holiness is that union as a victim with our Lord Jesus Christ, par-

²⁵⁹ Sermon, Ecône, September 14, 1975; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 69.

²⁶⁰ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²⁶¹ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

ticipating with Him in the Redemption of all mankind.²⁶²

3. *The cross: Source of hope and strength*

Our Lord Jesus Christ opened a pathway to Heaven. There exists no other. And our Lord said it Himself: "*The way is narrow (cf. Mt. 7:14). Take up your cross and follow Me if you wish to be My disciples (cf. Lk. 14:7), if you wish to enter Heaven.*"²⁶³

Catholic doctrine is so beautiful! It transforms so completely our life here below! That is what prepares us for eternal life. *O crux ave, spes unica*, "Hail, O cross, our only hope."²⁶⁴ The cross is our hope, because it is only a path, a way, the way toward eternal life, toward glory. But we have to pass by that way, we have to take up the cross and carry it behind our Lord in order to reach eternal life. That *via crucis* has to be our own throughout our life, in order to reach eternal life.²⁶⁵

Just as in the desert those who looked upon the bronze serpent attached to a rod were healed, so also those men will be saved who choose to follow our Lord, who look upon the cross, who put all their hope in the cross. Those who turn away from the cross, who abandon the cross of our Lord, who refuse to see it or to hear it spoken of, will indeed be lost.²⁶⁶

The fate of the whole human race and of the life of every man is decided upon the wood of the cross. Are we going to be there with our Lord? Are we going to follow Him onto His cross the way He asked us to? "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*" (Mt. 16:24). The language of St. Paul is striking: "*Our old self has been crucified with Him, in order that the body of sin may be destroyed, that we may no longer be slaves to sin... Thus do you consider yourselves also as dead to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ.*" (Rom. 6:6, 11)²⁶⁷

This simple thought should maintain us ever watchful: "Am I, right now, grieving our Lord? I do not want to cause Him pain, I

²⁶² Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 211.

²⁶³ Sermon, Rouen, May 1, 1990.

²⁶⁴ Hymn *Vexilla Regis*, from Vespers of Passiontide.

²⁶⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 14, 1975.

²⁶⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 10th conference.

²⁶⁷ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 9, 1982, 8th conference.

want to be always very close to Him who suffered so much for me." Look at your crucifix. See our Lord covered in wounds, covered in blood, and say to yourself, "He who so loved me! How could I ever do anything that takes me away from Him? I could not do it. If I have done so before now, at this moment I resolve to be vigilant. He has loved me so much." That is the Christian life.²⁶⁸

10. CONCLUSION: JESUS CHRIST IS EVERYTHING

I would like to give you this piece of advice, which is particularly valuable in our time: Be attached to our Lord Jesus Christ and ask the Holy Spirit to give you that understanding, that knowledge, that wisdom which you need today more than ever, in order really to understand that, without our Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing, nothing! That our Lord Jesus Christ is everything. We can only judge the value, the holiness, the price of things and of souls, by how much they reflect the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by how much they are sanctified by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see right away the immense consequences of this fundamental principle. In Heaven and on earth, all things have value only by our Lord Jesus Christ, only in our Lord Jesus Christ, only through their connection to Him.²⁶⁹

We have to reach the point of never again judging things here below without thinking of our Lord Jesus Christ, without His being our rule of thought. What does our Lord think of this, of that, of events, of things which concern us, of what I think, of what I am?

It is He who is the model of our holiness, the cause of our holiness, the cause of our grace. It is He who is our Creator, as well. So the object of all of our meditation, our contemplation, should be our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is going to transform your life.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 4th conference.

²⁶⁹ Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1988.

²⁷⁰ Sermon, Ecône, October 3, 1974.

III

THE LIFE OF GOD IN US

Before ascending into Heaven, Jesus Christ promised His Apostles that He would send them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transformed them profoundly, and today He plays a preeminent role in the sanctification of the baptized.

God did not want to isolate Himself from us. He could have created us and left us in a certain isolation, but no! Already by our nature alone, we are created to turn toward Him; but He willed to do much more than that.²⁷¹

To these poor creatures, these little beings of nothing at all, that little dust that we are, God wanted to give a share in His own nature and in the intimate love which unites Him to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. It is something which we cannot understand, which surpasses our imagination, our mind, our intellect. Yet we have to meditate on it and give thanks to God.²⁷²

1.

THE TWO MODES OF GOD'S PRESENCE

In order better to understand the mode of presence of the Holy Trinity in the souls of the just, it is important to distinguish it from that by which God is present in every creature.

²⁷¹ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 18, 1978, 3rd conference.

²⁷² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974.

1. GOD PRESENT IN ALL CREATURES

As the philosophers say, God is present in us in three ways: by power, by presence and by essence. We are not in the supernatural domain here, even if we are looking with the eyes of the faith, since Holy Scripture does speak of it. God is present by His power, by His presence and by His essence, in a purely natural way, in all the material things which surround us.

Fr. Froget explains it very well, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas:

“He is present by His power, because all things are subject to His sovereign command: He is present everywhere like a king who, while residing in his palace, is by a fiction deemed present in all the parts of his kingdom where he exercises authority. By His presence, that is to say most intimately, because He knows all things and sees all things; and nothing, however hidden it may be, can escape His attention; all things are present to Him as objects are said to be in our presence, although they may be situated at a slight distance from our person. Finally, by His essence, for He is as really and in His very substance present to all created things as a monarch is present in person to the throne on which he is seated.’²⁷³

“The reason for this substantial presence of God in His creatures is that not one of them could dispense with the divine action preserving its existence and actuating its operations; and since substance and action are not really distinct in God, it follows that ‘He is substantially - in His actual reality - present wherever He works, *i.e.*, in all things and in all places.’”²⁷⁴

St. Paul said, “*God is not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:27-18). These words are worth their weight in gold.²⁷⁵

We usually begin the morning prayers of St. Sulpice with these words: “Let us place ourselves in the presence of God and adore Him.” The act of placing ourselves in the presence of God is certainly an important thing because God is present everywhere.

²⁷³ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, a. 8, a. 3.

²⁷⁴ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 8, a. 1, in *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, Barthélemy Froget, O.P., translated from the 1900 French edition by Fr. Sydney Raemers, The Newman Press, Westminster, MD, 1952, p. 5.

²⁷⁵ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 19, 1978, 5th conference.

He is at the origin of all beings, so there can be no being which is distant from Him. We have too much of a tendency obviously to think of God as being far away from us. Since He is so much more perfect than we are, we have a hard time thinking of ourselves as having anything to do with Him; but that would be wrong, too, to think of Him as being far away from us. God is present everywhere.²⁷⁶

2. JESUS AS GOD PRESENT IN EVERY MAN

St. Paul told the pagan Greeks, when he was speaking to them on the Areopagus, that God *"is not far from any one of us"* (Acts 17:27). And he adds, *"In Him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28). We have to say the same of our Lord Jesus Christ: *"He is not far from any one of us."*

But there are two ways of being near. Our Lord can be near as Creator, but He can be near by love, by charity, by union of souls.

So it is obvious that He is very far from demons in the second sense.

Consequently, as Creator, God is here. Our Lord is here, in the midst of us. Not only does He hear us, but it is He who gives me speech to speak with you, it is He who gives you eyes to see me, it is He who gives you ears to hear me. You would not be able to do either one if our Lord were not there. If the Incarnate Word, God the Creator, in whom all things subsist, were not here, we would immediately fall back into nothingness. And so our Lord is there. He is present; we can be sure of that.

Our Lord is present here, but what difference is there between His presence as Redeemer in us and His presence as Creator in all those who do not believe, or His presence even in demons, since He is everywhere? Well, to understand that, let us meet the gaze of our Lord as He walked in Palestine, as He encountered sinners, the sick, the Apostles. Do you remember the words of our Lord to Nathaniel, *"When you were beneath the fig tree, I saw you"* (Jn. 1:48)? But how, since Nathaniel was certainly hidden? *"I saw you,"* says our Lord. Our Lord is there, with us. He meets our gaze and questions us: *"What do you wish of Me? Yes or no, do you love Me? Do you wish to follow Me or not? Are you*

²⁷⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1989.

with Me or against Me?" His gaze says it all. Remember the gaze of our Lord upon St. Peter when Peter had just denied Him three times. The Gospel says it: Our Lord and St. Peter saw each other, met each other. The gaze of our Lord fell upon St. Peter (*Lk. 22:61*). Think of everything there must have been in that gaze.

So our Lord is not far from us. He is with us, He is in us. We must often remember the words of St. Paul. They are very moving and very strong: "*In Him we live, in Him we move, in Him we have our being*" (*cf. Acts 17:28*). God is not far from any one of us. He is there. So we would be nothing without Him. And so we should say to Him: "My God, you are there, I love You, I want nothing but You, I wish to live only for You, You are my everything," as St. Catherine of Siena would say.²⁷⁷ God is everything, I am nothing. That ought to be the cry of our heart, of our soul. May we live with our Lord continually, in all of our difficulties, in all of our trials. May all be subject to our Lord. May we never find ourselves at a loss, alone, when we can have the help of Him who created us.²⁷⁸

The presence of God in us as our Creator should already be enough to give us a profound spirituality. The consequences of that simple truth oblige us to adoration, to prayer, to humility, to the accomplishment of the will of God, to obedience. Those are natural virtues which we need to cultivate in the light of that very simple given: the presence of God in us as Creator and Master of all things.²⁷⁹

3. GOD PRESENT IN THE SOULS OF THE JUST

The Holy Trinity is present in a soul in the state of grace not only to maintain it in being but to protect it and love it. The soul is in turn made capable of knowing God as He knows Himself and of loving Him as He loves Himself. Archbishop Lefebvre describes here this new mode of God's presence in the soul.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Bl. Raymond of Capua, *Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, translated by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, Peter F. Cunningham, Bookseller, Philadelphia, 1860, 1st Part, ch. 10, pp. 70-71, and 2nd Part, ch. 1, p. 80.

²⁷⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 24, 1978.

²⁷⁹ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 1975, 4th conference.

1. *Temple of the Holy Trinity*

Over and above our natural life, God has given us supernatural life. He willed to bring us into the family of the Trinity, in a way. He willed to make us penetrate this absolutely inconceivable mystery of the Trinity.²⁸⁰

As the Word of God comes into us especially in the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Spirit comes into us by sanctifying grace. Obviously the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are never separated from each other. When the Word is there, the Father is there, the Holy Spirit is there; but we attribute certain acts more particularly to the Father, others to the Word and others to the Holy Spirit. But these three Persons are consubstantial. The substance of God is one. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are always together. Our souls are therefore the temple of the Holy Trinity, but we attribute the presence of God in us particularly to the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying grace is a particular effect of charity, and therefore of the Holy Spirit.

So you start to see the marvelous different facets of this grace, which communicates to us an uncreated gift: God Himself. Just as, when we go into the chapel, there in the tabernacle is the Word of God united to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, so also in our souls the Father and the Word are united to the Holy Spirit.²⁸¹

2. *God present in us as a friend*

God has enlightened our mind by a greater light than that of reason, and which allows us to understand things that we would never otherwise have understood and never have seen without grace; and He has endowed our will with a much greater charity than we would have had if we had merely had the gifts of nature.²⁸²

We can somehow experience the presence of God in us, like the presence of a friend who is beside us in the darkness. We may not see him, but we would recognize the presence of that friend beside us. We do not see the presence, but we know someone is there.

²⁸⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 4, 1975.

²⁸¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980.

²⁸² Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 4, 1975.

So also we can, by sanctifying grace, believe that God is present in us, that He is with us. He has told us so in a very precise way: “He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (Jn. 14:21).²⁸³

“God is therefore really and substantially present to the Christian in the state of grace. His presence is not merely a presence, but a real possession, which already begins to bear fruit of enjoyment.²⁸⁴ It is a union far superior to that which binds unsanctified beings to their Creator; our union is surpassed only by the union of the two natures in the Person of the Incarnate Word.”²⁸⁵ You see, Fr. Froget makes a comparison between this mystical union of our Lord with our souls and the union of the two natures in our Lord in the Person of the Word. It is “a union which, when fervently cultivated, is so blissful as to be in the true sense of the word a foretaste of heaven’s joys, a prelude to happiness eternal. St. Thomas²⁸⁶ is not afraid, therefore, to assert that there is an imperfect inception in this life itself, of the future happiness of the saints, and he compares it to the buds which are the promise and the earnest of the coming harvest.”²⁸⁷ In the degree God permits, we ought to have joy in this union of our soul with Him; in the consolations He may give us in our prayer, in our meditations, in our reading, in this whole life which we spend in the company of our Lord, but which is obviously only a beginning of future beatitude. And we should not hesitate to contemplate the joys of Heaven which will one day be ours, because Heaven truly may not be far away.²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Sermon, Ecône, March 10, 1974.

²⁸⁴ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 43, a. 3, ad 2; I^a, q. 38, a. 1.

²⁸⁵ *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, p. 83.

²⁸⁶ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 69, a. 2.

²⁸⁷ *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, p. 83-84.

²⁸⁸ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 20, 1978, 7th conference.

2.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: SOURCE OF HOLINESS

1. THE GREAT STRANGER

A very important devotion, which we are going to need if we want our spiritual life to grow, and if we want finally to give God the place He deserves in our soul, is the devotion to the Holy Spirit. Spiritual authors sometimes call the Holy Spirit “the great stranger,” and rightfully so. For many, the Holy Spirit seems nearly superfluous, useless. We know God the Father, Creator; we know God the Son, who became incarnate and who is therefore closer to us, all the more so because He is present in the Holy Eucharist. On the other hand, we have a hard time situating the Holy Spirit, we don’t see very well what His action could be, since we have already been created and redeemed.

What could the Holy Spirit be doing beyond that? Actually, the Holy Spirit is doing everything. The Father and the Son do not act outside of the Holy Spirit. Why? The reason is very simple. St. John in one of his letters tells us that “*God is charity*” (1 John 4:8). Therefore God cannot act otherwise than by charity; He cannot work outside of that charity which is His own nature, which is His own being. And that charity is in fact *personalized* in the Holy Spirit. The very Person of the Holy Spirit is the charity of the Father toward the Son and of the Son toward the Father. Consequently, neither one can do anything except through their love, that is to say, through the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁹

2. THE DIVINE FIRE SENT BY JESUS

The Christian era, which goes from our Lord to the end of time, is essentially the work of sanctification and redemption carried out in souls by the Holy Spirit, by the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 1975, 6th conference.

²⁹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1982.

Our Lord wants to give us the Holy Spirit. It is obvious that He wants to give us that supernatural life which He Himself calls a fire: "*I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?*" (Lk. 12:49) What is this fire? It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love which allows us to practice charity toward God and toward our neighbor by love of God. That is what our Lord came to enkindle in our souls.²⁹¹

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPEL

It seems that the Holy Spirit is not very present in the spirituality of most Christians. And yet He is mostly the one acting in us in our sanctification. So we should actually have a great devotion toward Him and really study His action. And Holy Scripture gives us the opportunity to do so.²⁹²

1. *The action of the Holy Spirit in Mary*

You know the text of the Annunciation to the most Blessed Virgin: "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee,*" says the angel, "*and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*" (Lk. 1:35). Therefore, the work of a veritable new creation was going to take place in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the descent of the Holy Spirit in her.²⁹³

Next you see the little episode which is recounted in the Gospel about the most Blessed Virgin Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth. Hardly had the Virgin Mary been filled with the Holy Spirit, hardly had she conceived her divine Son Jesus in her womb, than she leaves. She is caught up in a way by the Holy Spirit. She goes away, she crosses the mountain - "*in haste*" the Gospel even tells us (Lk. 1:39). Why? Where is she going? What is she going to do? Couldn't she have remained in the Temple, recollected, praying, thanking God? No, she leaves, quick, quick, quick! She goes to see her cousin Elizabeth.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 8th conference.

²⁹² Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 21, 1978, 9th conference.

²⁹³ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 1975, 6th conference.

²⁹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1977.

“She entered the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe in her womb leapt. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Lk. 1:40-41) So Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and St. John the Baptist, her child, was at the same moment sanctified by the Holy Spirit. You see how carefully Holy Scripture emphasizes that action of the Holy Spirit in all the important things.²⁹⁵

What else does Mary do? She announces the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. She announces the coming of the Word to earth. She sings her *Magnificat* (Lk. 1:46-55). She sings the glory of God to her cousin Elizabeth, and she does so transported by the Holy Spirit. In this way, she shows us that, if we have the Holy Spirit in us, we cannot do otherwise than be missionaries.²⁹⁶

2. *The conversation with Nicodemus*

1. Jesus raises the level of the discussion

To Nicodemus²⁹⁷ who had come to see Him, our Lord immediately declared, *“Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (Jn. 3:3). Then Nicodemus asked our Lord, *“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born again?”* (Jn. 3:4)

We see in what a material way, what a purely temporal way, Nicodemus judges things. And our Lord very gently leads him to the supernatural level and works in him a conversion.

Our Lord repeats, *“Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (Jn. 3:5). Already our Lord is saying more: the first time He spoke only of being reborn; now He speaks of being reborn of water and of the Holy Spirit. He offers Nicodemus a much higher knowledge.

Then our Lord makes the comparison, *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (Jn. 3:6). It

²⁹⁵ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 1975, 6th conference.

²⁹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1977.

²⁹⁷ Nicodemus: a Greek name, as many Jews had in the time of Christ. The Gospel presents him as a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme council of the Jewish nation. The primary mission of the Sanhedrin was to recognize the Messiah and to make him known. Most of its members followed their religion to the letter, but had lost the spirit of it.

is a great lesson for us to see that our Lord immediately rises to the spiritual point of view. Whereas we always have a tendency to stay on the level of what we see, what we touch. We are tempted to take even spiritual realities in a purely sensible or material way only. Our Lord raises us higher: *"The wind blows where it will, and thou hearest its sound but dost not know where it comes from or where it goes"* (Jn. 3:8). The soul, like the wind, is therefore subject to the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and we do not know where the Holy Spirit may direct us. The Holy Spirit Himself directs us by the actual graces which He gives us, according to the needs of the moment. *"So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* (Jn. 3:8) He who is born of the Spirit follows the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is love, and therefore he follows the law of charity, which consists in loving God and his neighbor – but by paths that are sometimes quite mysterious.²⁹⁸

2. Jesus reveals His identity

"Nicodemus answered and said to Him, 'How can these things be?' Answering him, Jesus said, 'Thou art a teacher in Israel and dost not know these things?'" (Jn. 3:9-10) And there again, our Lord is going to raise him even higher in speaking of who He is. It is admirable to see that the charity which is given to us by the Holy Spirit leads us to our Lord Jesus Christ and leads us to recognize His divinity. The Holy Spirit gives the knowledge and the understanding of the Word of God, of the Word Incarnate. For the Samaritan woman, it is the same thing. That is why faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is truly the criterion of the soul which is in charity: *"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned"* (Mk. 16:16). Our Lord then says, *"Amen, amen, I say to thee, We speak of what We know, and We bear witness to what We have seen; and Our witness you do not receive. If I have spoken of earthly things to you, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I speak to you of heavenly things?"* (Jn. 3:11-12)

Then our Lord pronounces these beautiful words: *"No one has ascended into Heaven except Him who has descended from Heaven: the Son of Man who is in Heaven"* (Jn. 3:13). He is speaking of Himself. Imagine yourself standing before a person who affirms such a thing. Our Lord is telling Nicodemus, *"I am in Heaven."*

So, if someone receives the Holy Spirit, he rises to the under-

²⁹⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 16, 1980.

standing of our Lord Jesus Christ and, by the very fact, he is in Heaven, since he is in our Lord Jesus Christ and with our Lord Jesus Christ. *"Whoever believes in the Son of God will not perish, but will have life everlasting. For 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."* (cf. Jn. 3:15-16)

That is how our Lord, speaking of the Spirit, communicates His Spirit and enlightens the soul about His divinity and about the mystery of His Incarnation; for the great sign of the love of God for us is the Incarnation. That is why the Church asks us to kneel when we say, *"Who took flesh by the action of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary,"* in the *Credo*, and when we say, *"And the Word was made flesh,"* in the Gospel of St. John at the end of Mass. The great revelation is that the Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us.

The Holy Spirit made known to us the great manifestation of the charity of God for us. This knowledge can only be given to us by the Holy Spirit. Someone who believes, who believes with a lively, active faith, can only believe by the presence of the Holy Spirit in him. *"He who believes" in the divinity of our Lord "is not judged; but he who does not believe is already judged,"* says our Lord, *"because he does not believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God" (Jn. 3:18).* Everything revolves around the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, our Lord reveals His divinity to Nicodemus in order to communicate grace to him through the Holy Spirit.²⁹⁹

3. *The conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman*

The Samaritan woman met Jesus on the edge of Jacob's well (Jn. 4:7-26). The Apostles had left. Our Lord is alone with the Samaritan woman and asks her for a drink. She says to Him, *"How is it that thou, although thou art a Jew, dost ask drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman?"* As a rule, Jews did not like Samaritans. And our Lord answers her, *"If thou didst know the gift of God, and who it is who says to thee, 'Give Me to drink,' thou, perhaps, would have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."* She is completely lost at this point: He asks me for a drink and now he is saying that he is the one who could give me a source of living water. And the

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

woman asks Him, *“Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Whence then hast thou living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and drank from it, himself, and his sons, and his flocks?”*

Then our Lord moves gently forward to enlighten her thinking. He follows the psychology of the woman and gently opens her eyes, which are closed because she is still in sin. He answers her, *“Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. He, however, who drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up unto life everlasting.”* The woman is probably still on the level of very material considerations, whereas our Lord is raising her thoughts toward eternal life.

So the woman says to Him, *“Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, or come here to draw.”* And now our Lord is going to take away the obstacle which is preventing her from understanding, by putting His finger on the wound which is in the heart of this woman. He says, *“Go, call thy husband and come here.”* In saying that, our Lord is penetrating the heart of this woman. There, she starts to be a little bit at a loss for words and wonders who this man could be, mentioning her husband like that. She knows very well what she is. She says, *“I have no husband.”* Our Lord tells her, *“Thou hast said well, ‘I have no husband,’ for thou has had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. In this thou hast spoken truly.”* Now she really is dumbfounded: *“Sir, I see that thou art a prophet.”*

Our Lord has taken away the obstacle she had on her heart and she starts to reason in a much more spiritual manner: *“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that at Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”* Our Lord says to her, *“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship, but true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeks such to worship Him. God is spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.”* You see how our Lord raises her up as He did before with Nicodemus: God is spirit.

The woman says to Him, *“I know that the Messiah is coming.”* And suddenly she starts thinking of the Messiah. Our Lord, by the Holy Spirit, already suggests to her the Messiah. You see how the Spirit – and they were just speaking of the Spirit – is going to lead

her, also, to belief in the Messiah, in our Lord Himself. *"I know that the Messiah is coming, who is called Christ, the Anointed, and when he comes he will tell us all things."* And our Lord then says to her, *"I am the Messiah."* Our Lord shows that grace has to lead to the knowledge and love of Himself, because that is the great mystery which God has revealed to us.³⁰⁰

4. THE EFFECTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE APOSTLES

1. *The Apostles enlightened by the Holy Spirit*

The Apostles were gathered in the Cenacle to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Heaven had disappeared from their eyes and nearly from their heart. Yet Heaven is what our Lord wished to give them, by the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost the Apostles were filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Heaven took possession of their soul and of their heart, and never again were they separated from that Holy Spirit nor from Jesus.

They understood what Heaven is compared to the earth, what the spirit is compared to the flesh, what eternal goods are worth compared to anything temporal.³⁰¹

That is when they finally believed in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and in His attributes, which are to be King, Priest and Judge. Henceforward, for them, there was no more doubt, not the slightest hesitation. They were truly filled with the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that Spirit which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself had promised to them is the Spirit of Truth: *"I send My Spirit to you. He will glorify Me, for He will receive of what is Mine. All things that the Father has are Mine; all that the Holy Spirit will give you comes from Me."* (cf. Jn. 16:7, 14-15) That is what our Lord says. *"Then you will understand why I have come."*³⁰²

2. *The Apostles on fire with divine love*

What does the Holy Spirit inspire in us? Notice what we are told in the *Acts of the Apostles*. There it says that as soon as the Apostles received the Holy Spirit, they spoke. They received

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

³⁰² Sermon, Ecône, June 6, 1976.

tongues of fire which expressed outwardly the descent of the Holy Spirit inside them. The fire was in tongues, meaning from that moment on their heart would be on fire with the divine love and that it would drive them to preach.³⁰³

And the Apostles began preaching: “*They began to speak*” (Acts 2:4). And what did they say? They sang “*the praises of God*” (Acts 2:11), the glory of God. From that moment on, they understood that there is nothing beautiful, nothing great, nothing true for us here below, except to love God, to sing His praises, to give thanks, because God created us; because He sent us His Son Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us and shed all of His blood for us; because He redeemed us and made us children of God. So they sang the praises of God in their language, and they were understood by all those who had come from the ends of the earth. That is what the Apostles received: a profound faith in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whereas, just a short time before, they were still asking our Lord, “*When are You going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (cf. Acts 1:6) They still had only a very earthbound idea of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. They saw Him as king of Israel, a temporal king, a king who would give Israel supremacy over the whole world. That is the idea the Apostles still had just a short time before our Lord ascended into Heaven, after His Resurrection, after He had spent forty days with them, teaching them what the kingdom of God actually was. They had not yet understood. But through the Holy Spirit they understood that it was no longer question of a temporal reign, but of a reign over souls, over minds, over wills, over hearts.³⁰⁴

This time they understood, and from that moment on they were ready to go even to martyrdom; they were going to shed their blood for our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁰⁵

The most characteristic phrase from the discourse of St. Peter when he was filled with the Holy Spirit was in his affirmation that “*there is no salvation outside Jesus Christ. There is no other name by*

³⁰³ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

³⁰⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 6, 1976.

³⁰⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 4th conference.

which we must be saved" (cf. Acts 4:12).³⁰⁶

St. Peter said right away to the Jews all around him, "You have crucified the Son of God, the Just, Him who had come to redeem you."

And then Jews said, "We realize our mistake. What shall we do?"

"Be baptized, repent of your sins, do penance, and you will receive the Holy Spirit." Then three thousand among them received the baptism of the Spirit and they were all transformed, and their understanding was completely submitted to our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:22-23, 37-43).

That is what the Holy Spirit has to put in your hearts as well, and what we always have to remember: the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁰⁷

5. THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS

It is interesting to see what St. Thomas thinks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.³⁰⁸ For him it is very connected with the idea of mission. Just as our Lord said He was sent by the Father, so also is the Holy Spirit sent to us for our sanctification.³⁰⁹

1. *The origin of the divine missions in the world*

The idea of mission, "to be sent," often arises in Holy Scripture. I will read you a few lines of Fr. Froget, in his book *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*: "There is perhaps no truth more frequently alluded to in the Gospel and in the Epistles of St. Paul than that of the *mission*, that is to say, the *giving*, the *indwelling* of the Divine Persons in the souls of the just. When about to leave this earth to return to His heavenly Father, our Lord promised to send the Paraclete to His Apostles, wishing thereby to comfort them, and to lessen somewhat the sorrow caused by His departure: 'I tell you the truth; it is expedient to you that I go; for if I go not the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you' (Jn. 16:7)."

³⁰⁶ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

³⁰⁷ Sermon, Ecône, June 6, 1976.

³⁰⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 43.

³⁰⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 1, 1987.

Fr. Froget continues. “Again Jesus said to His Apostles, ‘If you love Me, keep My Commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him; but you shall know Him, because He shall abide with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.’ (Jn. 14:15-18) This new Comforter whom Jesus promises to His Apostles, is none other than the Holy Ghost.

“This *mission* of the Holy Ghost, this *giving* of the Paraclete, whom Jesus promised to His chosen ones, was not, however, to be the exclusive privilege of the Apostles; it was intended also as the privilege of all those who, through grace, are made the children of God.”³¹⁰

St. Thomas says the same thing in a question on the Person of the Holy Spirit.³¹¹

2. *The conditions of the divine missions*

St. Thomas wonders whether the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit is directed toward all those who have grace. Here is what he says in his conclusion:

“As stated above, mission in its very meaning implies that he who is sent either begins to exist where he was not before, as occurs to creatures; or begins to exist where he was before, but in a new way, in which sense mission is ascribed to the divine Persons. Thus, mission as regards the one to whom it is sent implies two things, the indwelling³¹² of grace, and a certain renewal by grace. Thus the invisible mission is sent to all in whom are to be found these two conditions.”³¹³

So, we can really say that every increase in grace involves a particular mission of the Holy Spirit.

³¹⁰ Barthélemy Froget, O.P., *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, pp. 27-28.

³¹¹ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 43, a. 6. Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 1, 1987.

³¹² The word *indwelling* names the mode of presence of God in the souls of the just.

³¹³ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 43, a. 6.

And in the "Technical Notes," the Dominican Father commenting on St. Thomas says the following about the divine missions:

"Scripture in both Testaments is full of sendings or *missions* which come to us from God. God sends us His benefits, His aid, and His chastisements, as well; He sends us His messengers, whether angels or prophets. And finally, we see God Himself being sent by God."³¹⁴ So St. Thomas' question 43 is particularly rich. It is encouraging to think that the grace we are receiving is an ongoing mission of the Holy Spirit in us. There is an activity there; it is not a gift which is bestowed without the presence of the giver. That would be a misunderstanding of the action of God in us by sanctifying grace.³¹⁵

3. *The visible missions of the Holy Spirit*

"Based on the scriptural studies of St. Augustine,³¹⁶ the scholastics make a distinction between visible missions and invisible missions. The Incarnation, or the sending of the Son in the flesh which manifests Him to the world, is a visible mission. Likewise a visible mission is the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church on Pentecost: He manifests Himself in the wind and in the tongues of fire."³¹⁷

"We recognize another visible mission of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles on Easter evening, when Jesus breathed upon them; to Jesus Himself, in the appearance of the dove during His baptism, and in the bright cloud of Tabor."³¹⁸

4. *The invisible mission in souls*

"The visible mission of the Holy Spirit reveals His invisible mission in the hearts which He sanctifies, for example in the Apostles, in the Upper Room; a mission accomplished in Jesus from the moment of His conception, but only made manifest at

³¹⁴ H.-F. Dondaine, O.P., "Renseignements Techniques," in *La Trinité (Summa Theologica)*, La Revue des Jeunes, Desclée and Co., Paris, 1950, p. 423.

³¹⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 1, 1987.

³¹⁶ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, books II and especially IV (ch. 18-21).

³¹⁷ H.-F. Dondaine, O.P., "Renseignements Techniques," in *La Trinité (Summa Theologica)*, p. 423-424. Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 1, 1987.

³¹⁸ H.-F. Dondaine, O.P., "Renseignements Techniques," in *La Trinité (Summa Theologica)*, p. 423-424. Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 3, 1987.

His baptism. There is also considered to be an invisible mission of the Word in souls, although it is less explicit in Scripture."³¹⁹

St. Thomas' description of this divine life in us is very profound and at the same time very simple. It explains the mission of God in us, that presence of God in souls which have sanctifying grace. The visible world was created for our sanctification, and our sanctification is ordered to the glory of God. The Holy Trinity comes into us and sanctifies us, and we are called to spread the charity of the Holy Trinity which is the Holy Spirit, in such a way that charity returns to God through us. And so there is produced in us that same circuit that flows among the Persons of the Trinity. That circuminsession which takes place in the intimate life of the Holy Trinity now flows also through spiritual creatures. By a certain analogy it even flows through material creatures.

Yet the end is to sanctify souls, to communicate to them the charity of the Holy Spirit, the charity of God, and for that charity to return to God as praise, as glory, as love. God must love Himself; it is impossible that He not love Himself. Even through creatures, it is His own love which comes back to Himself, because He is the sole good, because He is the source and the end of all good.

So it is very encouraging for our spiritual life, to realize that we are actually under the motion of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul tells us, "*Whoever are led by the Holy Spirit are the sons of God*" (Rom. 8:14).³²⁰

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. *Grieve not the Holy Spirit*

Unfortunately, there are some who sin against the Spirit. We see a case in the *Acts of the Apostles* with Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to our Lord in deceiving the Apostles concerning the price of the field which they had sold. "*Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Spirit and by fraud keep back part of the price of the land?' ... And Ananias, hearing these words fell down and expired.*" (Acts 5:3, 5) And then three hours later the wife of Ananias came. "*And Peter said to her,*

³¹⁹ H.-F. Dondaine, O.P., "*Renseignements Techniques,*" in *La Trinité (Summa Theologica)*, p. 424.

³²⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 3, 1987.

“Tell me, did you sell the land for so much?”

“And she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’

“And Peter said to her, ‘Why have you agreed to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?’” (Acts 5:8-9).

These words illustrate that sin goes against the Spirit; it grieves the Holy Spirit. That is the case with mortal sin especially, which breaks off relations with God completely, but it is also the case with venial sin. Any willful disobedience toward God, even in small things, is resisting the action of the Holy Spirit in us.³²¹

Fr. Froget draws a conclusion at the end of his book on the Holy Spirit. He says the following:

“This is why so many Christians in the possession of habitual grace and of the Divine energies which accompany it, remain, nevertheless, so feeble and so sluggish in God’s service, so little zealous for their perfection, so inclined to earth, so forgetful of the things of heaven, so easily fascinated by evil. This is why the Apostle exhorts us ‘to grieve not the Holy Spirit of God’ (Eph. 4:30)” by our infidelity to grace, and especially “‘to extinguish not the Spirit’ (1 Thess. 5:19)” in our hearts.

“There is another reason which finally explains why a seed so prolific of holiness produces oftentimes so sorry a harvest. It is this: that knowing but very imperfectly the treasure of which they are the guardians, a number of Christians form only a faint estimate of it, and put themselves to little pains to make it yield fruit. Yet what power, what generosity, what respect for self, what watchfulness and what consolation and joy, would not this thought, if constantly held before the mind and piously meditated upon, inspire: *The Holy Ghost dwells in my heart!* He is there, a Powerful Protector, always ready to defend me against my enemies, to sustain me in my combats, to assure me the victory. A Faithful Friend, He is always disposed to give me a hearing, and, far from being a source of sadness and weariness, His conversation brings gladness and joy (cf. Wis. 8:16)... He is there the ever present witness of my efforts and sacrifices, counting every one of my steps in order to reward them some day, following my whole course, forgetful of nothing that I do for His love and His glory.”³²² Those are beautiful, encouraging words.³²³

³²¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 21, 1988.

³²² B. Froget, O.P., *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, pp.

2. *Opening ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit*

We have to strive, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to act supernaturally, mortifying our initial impulses so as not simply to be dragged along by movements of nature. As Garrigou-Lagrange says,³²⁴ our natural activities have to be reined in or else they will prevail over the life of grace.

There are three degrees in natural activity.

The first is a natural ardor, which makes some people have to do everything with impetuosity. That disposition in no way proceeds from grace. It throws into turmoil, incoherence, obscurity.

The second degree of natural activity is less flagrant, less dangerous. We call it natural hastiness. We find it in people who have a more delicate conscience, but who often do not listen enough to the Holy Spirit in the depths of their heart. Their own will slips into their action and hinders the movement of grace. They let themselves be hypnotized, in a way, by an intermediary goal. They lose sight of the relation between this intermediary goal and the ultimate end, namely the glory of God and the salvation of souls. They do not pray enough and they forget that it is impossible to reach the last end without the help of the Holy Spirit. Many souls who aspire to perfection suffer from this defect without understanding what a great obstacle it brings to the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The third degree is a natural movement much more subtle and difficult to recognize than the two others. It happens in people whose passions are well under control, and who have a very pure intention, who consult our Lord in prayer for questions of any importance, but who don't wait long enough for the movement of grace before they take action. They forget that the Holy Spirit is the Master of time.

For example, when Jesus announced His sorrowful Passion to His disciples, "*Peter, taking Him aside, began to chide Him, saying, 'Far be it from Thee, O Lord; this will never happen to Thee.'*" Jesus

238-239.

³²³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 21, 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 71.

³²⁴ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Three Ages of the Interior Life (Les Trois Ages de la Vie Intérieure, 1938)*, translated by Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, O.P., TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., Rockford, IL., 1989, vol. 1.

turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan, thou art a scandal to Me; for thou dost not mind the things of God, but the those of men.'" (Mt. 16:22-23) Our thoughts remain on a human level. How often does that happen to us, simply because we don't have enough of that contact with the Holy Spirit.³²⁵

3. *Pray to and love the Holy Spirit*

We therefore need to have that desire to be truly moved by the Holy Spirit, and for that we have to pray to Him often. Perhaps we pray too mechanically when we say the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* at the beginning of all of our actions. If we only thought about what is contained in that beautiful prayer: it is so profound, so encouraging. And we also recite an *Ave Maria* at the same time, with the idea that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, filled with the Holy Spirit, will intercede with Him to lead us, because we need the Holy Spirit in all of our actions. We need His lights, His gifts. We cannot do without Him.³²⁶

The Holy Spirit in us is nothing less than Heaven in our hearts. It is Paradise already started in our hearts. If we really understand what the Holy Spirit is, and that grace which God gives us by Him - from the day of our baptism and through all of the sacraments we receive, especially Holy Communion - we will understand that Heaven is what we are receiving.³²⁷

Sic nos amantem, quis non redamaret? Who would not love in return one who has so loved us?³²⁸ When we become aware of the love which God has shown us, by the Revelation which God has given us, how could we not render Him love for love? And if there is one Person in God who ought truly to inspire that love in us, it is the Holy Spirit.³²⁹

4. *The Holy Spirit: Soul of the apostolate*

1. The Apostle *par excellence*

The Holy Spirit is the Apostle *par excellence* and by His very essence. This great truth ought to give a certain character to our

³²⁵ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 21, 1978, 9th conference.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

³²⁸ Christmas hymn *Adeste Fideles*.

³²⁹ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 21, 1978, 9th conference.

own apostolate: a character of humility and confidence; a character of holding ourselves and all our faculties in a state of readiness to serve; a character of peace and serenity amid all the vicissitudes of failures, successes, trials or consolations. "In all things give thanks to God" (1 Thess. 5:18).³³⁰ That constancy in thanksgiving will show that the Spirit of God is in us.

The conviction and the penetration of this all-important truth will help us avoid a fault which today occurs only too often, that of putting the work of the Church's enemies side by side with the work of the Church or the Holy Spirit. The works are not on the same level nor do they use the same procedures or the same means. "The Holy Spirit breathes where He will" (cf. Jn. 3:8).³³¹

2. Do not imitate the adversaries of the Church

If we forget this principle of the Holy Spirit, soul and source of our apostolate, we will be tempted to copy the enemies of the Church, to look for expedients, for purely temporal means; to put all our confidence in methodic and rational organization; to worry about healthcare, social work or economics before we put souls in contact with that divine source out of which flow all benefits, spiritual and material, eternal and temporal. Someone who is animated by the Holy Spirit cannot be indifferent to his brothers; his charity will push him toward good works of every kind, both spiritual and material. But someone who is not animated by the Spirit of God will forget about trying to bring his brothers into the Mystical Body; he will settle for trying to bring them certain material benefits, so that ultimately his philanthropy will turn to the harm of those he had wanted to help.

Of course, we often have to work through the body to reach the soul, in the sense that the practice of unselfish charity touches the heart more deeply than words do. But we have to avoid emptying our charity of that invitation to the grace of salvation, by our own lack of confidence in the Holy Spirit; by a secularism or a neutrality about religion that would stifle the grace of God. When our Lord was healing bodies He was healing souls and drawing praise and glory to His Father.³³²

³³⁰ *In omnibus gratias agite.*

³³¹ Letter to Brother Priests, No. 69, Dakar, April 17, 1960; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, pp. 103-104.

³³² *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

3. Be proud of our faith

Here are a few comments from professor Gilson in chapter five of his book *Christianity and Philosophy*, a chapter entitled “The Intelligence in the Service of Christ the King.”

“To live as a Christian, to feel as a Christian, to think as a Christian, in a society which is not Christian... is something difficult and almost impossible.

“That is why we are constantly assailed by the temptation to weaken or adapt our truth, either to decrease the distance which separates our ways of thinking from those of the world, or even, and sometimes in all sincerity, in the hope of making Christianity more acceptable to the world and so contribute to its work of salvation.”³³³

Those are the temptations which we see in progressivism...

“I must apologize, because here I shall be obliged to play the thankless role of one pointing the finger at falsehood, not only in his adversaries, but also in his friends.

“So you might forgive me, remember that one who accuses his friends in this way is first accusing himself: the vivacity of his criticism is first expressing his own sentiment of a fault which he himself has committed and into which he feels always capable of falling again.

“I therefore ought to say, first of all, that one of the most serious afflictions of Catholicism today, particularly in France” – oh, I think he can say it for every country! – “is that Catholics no longer have the same pride in their faith. Sad to say, this absence of a sense of pride can very well co-exist with a certain complacency for everything that Catholics do or say, and with a fashionable sort of optimism, both of which are more fitting to a political party than a Church. What I regret is that instead of saying in all simplicity what we owe to our Church and to our faith; instead of showing what they bring to us and what we would not possess if not for them, we think it is good politics, or good strategy, and in the very interest of the Church, to act as though, after all, we were no different from anyone else. What is the greatest praise which many of us dare to hope for? The greatest the world can give:

³³³ Etienne Gilson, *Christianisme et Philosophie*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1936, p. 150.

'He's a Catholic, but he's a good man; you would never suspect.' Should we not be hoping for exactly the contrary? Not Catholics who wear their faith like a badge, but Catholics who have brought their faith so deeply into their work and their daily life, that the unbeliever starts to wonder what secret force must animate that life and work; and once he has discovered it, he says to himself, on the contrary, 'He is a good man, and now I know why: it's because he is a Catholic.'"³³⁴

It's very beautiful. What Mr. Gilson said so many years ago we can certainly repeat today.³³⁵

5. *The Catholic religion: A religion of the Holy Spirit.*

The Christian religion is a religion of the Holy Spirit; it is the religion of love, of charity. It is a religion that has transformed the world. Before, everything was hatred, egotism, pride, and obsession with the goods of this world. After our Lord, everything is the law of charity ruling within our hearts; it is sanctifying grace transforming hearts and souls. And we saw the development of marvelous things in that Christendom: convents covering all of Christian Europe. Now we have to ask God to maintain us in that spirit of Christendom, maintain us in that spirit of love of our Lord.³³⁶

3.

SANCTIFYING GRACE

Now, it remains for us to study, in the light of Revelation, the end for which the Holy Spirit comes into us, along with the various effects which are the ordinary result of His divine presence.

I think there are people who are very capable of understanding what sanctifying grace is and understanding the gift which we have received in grace, and they really do want to know.³³⁷

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-160.

³³⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 20, 1989.

³³⁶ Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, January 28, 1990; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 44-45.

³³⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 6, 1980.

1. WHAT IS SANCTIFYING GRACE?

Since God destines us to participate in His knowledge and in His love, we need to have a certain resemblance to Him. Otherwise how could the promise He gave us be fulfilled, that we would enjoy Him in the beatific vision? How could there be that union of blessed souls with God if there were not a certain resemblance between Him and them by the wisdom which He infuses in them, and which elevates their mind and their will by His grace, by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and by His own presence in them?³³⁸

1. *A participation in the charity of God*

For each one of us, our Lord willed by a kind of individual miracle to make us participate in His own divine nature through sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is a participation in the charity of God which dwells in us in a permanent manner.³³⁹ It is the most beautiful, the greatest thing we have in us. It transforms our soul to fill it with the charity of Christ.

We need to study what this participation in the charity of our Lord is, because it truly holds the source of our justification, our sanctification, our perfection.³⁴⁰

2. *A quality of a divine order*

What is grace? Sanctifying grace is an accident. It is not a substance which is added to the substance of human nature. Grace is a quality of a divine order,³⁴¹ inherent to our soul, according to the idea which the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* gives.³⁴² It is an accident, a form which is not subsistent. It is a kind of light, a kind of splendor, like a reflection of the beauty of God falling on our soul and making it beautiful and radiant.

St. Thomas says that “what is substantially in God, becomes accidental in the soul participating in the Divine goodness.”³⁴³

³³⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1989.

³³⁹ “*The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” (Rom. 5:5).

³⁴⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1980.

³⁴¹ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 110, a. 2.

³⁴² Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 95.

³⁴³ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2.

Therefore by grace we truly participate in the divine substance. It is an absolutely tremendous, extraordinary thing, far surpassing nature. By our reason, we have a knowledge of God through created beings. But by grace we have a much deeper knowledge of God.³⁴⁴

Grace is an accident, a quality, which affects our soul,³⁴⁵ but, as St. Thomas expresses so well, “an accident that results from a participation of some higher nature is superior to the subject, and more worthy, insofar as it is a participation of that higher nature. In this way grace or charity is superior to the soul, in as much as it is a participation of the Holy Spirit.”³⁴⁶ Consequently, even that accident is more worthy, more sublime than the entire nature itself, a little like a wild plant and the graft: the plant has its roots in the earth, but it is only worth anything because of the graft. It is also because of the graft that the plant is able to yield good fruit.

It is the same thing for us, in fact. The divine nature is grafted onto us by grace and makes us bear extraordinary fruit by the virtues, the gifts and the beatitudes.³⁴⁷

3. *A permanent supernatural gift*

Sanctifying grace is a supernatural gift because it surpasses our nature. Nature does not call for supernature; it is not made for having the beatific vision. That was one of the errors of the Pelagians, to believe that.

It is a free gift that God has given us. It is a permanent gift and not a provisional grace, as opposed to actual grace,³⁴⁸ which is a passing assistance, an illumination of the mind, an impulsion given to the will, a transitory motion. Sanctifying grace on the contrary is a stable gift which is received in the very essence of the soul and becomes a kind of second nature, a principle of supernatural life, the stable source of meritorious actions.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980.

³⁴⁵ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 110, a. 4.

³⁴⁶ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 23, a. 3, *ad* 3.

³⁴⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1974.

³⁴⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 110, a. 9.

³⁴⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980.

4. *A necessary gift*

We need to remember that a man can only exist with grace or without grace, and if he is without grace then his nature is disordered. There is not a single man on earth who lives now or ever lived in a state of pure nature. Adam and Eve were created in the state of grace, and those who have not received grace are in a state of privation and feel in their nature this lack of grace, because their very nature is wounded and feels disordered without it. Therefore a man must not be indifferent to grace, because God willed that he have that extraordinary perfection which is supernatural life, which is the life of God in him.³⁵⁰

2. **SANCTIFYING GRACE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

There are two aspects in sanctifying grace: there is the created grace, which is that accident which raises the substance of our nature to the state of son of God, and there is also the uncreated grace, subsistent charity, that is, the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying grace is like the temple wherein resides the Holy Spirit, who is uncreated. God Himself comes inside of us.³⁵¹

Sanctifying grace bestows a continual presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in us, with His Holy Spirit. With grace there is an effusion of the Holy Spirit in our soul, a permanent effusion that sets our hearts on fire.³⁵²

3. **SANCTIFYING GRACE: FRUIT OF THE GRACE OF JESUS**

The benefits of sanctifying grace come to us through the hands of priests and of the Catholic Church, yet we cannot forget that every grace, every increase in grace, comes to us from the inexhaustible fountain of Jesus' own grace, and can indeed come from no one but Him, our only Savior.

This reality of the divine life of Jesus circulating in our souls and in our bodies ought to be for us a subject of constant thanksgiving, and also a source of active vigilance so as not to let our lamps run low, like the foolish virgins.

³⁵⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1974.

³⁵¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980.

³⁵² Sermon, Ecône, June 9, 1984.

Let us meditate and contemplate the Heart of Jesus, pierced with the lance, opening upon us the fountains of eternal life!³⁵³

4. CHILD OF GOD BY GRACE

1. *A marvelous gift*

In our catechisms, we learned that we have become sons of God, that God willed not only to give us a human nature, but that He willed to make of us His children, privileged sons, participants in His divine nature, and therefore having capacities for knowledge of God, capacities for love of God and love of neighbor infinitely greater than if we only had our natural state. That is something we always need to remember. God called us to be His sons, whereas we should only have been His servants. With only our natural state, we would never have known God directly. We would have known Him always indirectly, through creatures. We would have been able to climb from the effects of God's almighty power to the ultimate cause which created us, to that Being who can only be God. We would have had to stop there.³⁵⁴

2. *Proofs from Scripture*

We know from countless texts of Holy Scripture that we have been renewed, recreated, regenerated, made participants in the divine nature, raised to the state of sons. St. John affirms in the Last Gospel which the priest reads at the end of Mass, "*To all who received Him, the Word gave the power of becoming sons of God: to those who believe in His name, who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (Jn. 1:12-13). And in his first Epistle, the same Apostle tells us, "*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are... Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like to Him, for we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him makes himself holy just as He is holy.*" (1 John 3:1-3)

St. Paul speaks no less clearly than the beloved disciple: "*But when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born*

³⁵³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 52; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 37.

³⁵⁴ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1975.

under the Law, that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father.' So that he is no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, an heir also through God." (Gal. 4:4-7)³⁵⁵ "Whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God. But if we are sons, we are heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." (Rom. 8:14-17) God knows St. Paul insisted on the fact that this new adoption, this regeneration, this renovation of which we are the object, we owe to our incorporation in our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁵⁶

3. Adoption: Fruit of the love of God

It is good to try to penetrate the mystery of grace as far as we can in order to esteem at its true value the incredible gift which God has given us. It is an act of love which is richer and greater still than that of having created us, for there is an immense distance between our state as a creature and the state of adoption in which God has placed us by His grace, and which makes of us children of God.

Fr. Froget says, "What an astonishing thing it is, this mutual love of Creator and creature! What more natural or more conformable to Divine law and to the motions of our heart, than that we should love God - infinite beauty that He is, inexhaustible goodness, veritable ocean of all perfections. But for this infinite Being to value our love, not merely permitting us to love Him, but inviting us in words overflowing with tenderness - as when He said: 'My son, give Me thy heart' (Prov. 23:26), and again: 'My delights are to be with the children of men' (Prov. 8:31) - aye, for God to bind us to love Him by the first of all His Commandments, the one which sums up all the rest, and along with this to promise us an infinite reward - this indeed ought to be enough to overpower us with amazement... We can well understand how God requires our adoration and homage, as something due to a being of supreme perfection. So, too, the privilege of serving Him is suffi-

³⁵⁵ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 114, a. 3.

³⁵⁶ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 1975, 4th conference. For the notion of incorporation, cf. *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 69, a. 5.

ciently explained, on one hand by His infinite condescension in accepting our service, and on the other by the very fact that we are His creatures. But is it not an inordinate ambition, of the wildest dream, or the vaguest myth, to believe that God shall draw us to Himself by bands of closest familiarity, the links of entire intimacy; in a word, by the strong ties of perfect friendship? If in the society of men friendship, properly speaking, between master and servant finds no place on account of the lack of equality, how can it become possible between the Master of masters and us His miserable creatures?"³⁵⁷ That God should have deigned to make us participants in His divine nature and that He should truly and not in a mere metaphor call us His children, His sons, is something incredible.

"What can God find in us to love, and what is there in us that makes Him seek after our love? What need has He of us, and what can He gain in loving us? Can we suppose that the creature is indispensable to God, to satisfy that longing of the heart and provide for that sweet and much coveted pleasure of loving and of knowing that one is loved? Anyone rash enough to suppose all this, to him the Psalmist would reply: '*I have said to the Lord Thou art my God, because Thou has no need of my goods*' (Ps. 15:2). And in all truth God is fully sufficient unto Himself... The Father loves the Son whom He hath begotten with an infinite love; the Son loves the Father with an equal love; and the result of this twofold love is the very Person of the Holy Ghost, who is Infinite Love divinely subsistent.

"Before the world was, before the angels, first creatures of God's hand, had begun their canticle of praise in honor of the Most High, when God was alone, He saw, contemplated and divinely uttered Himself in His Word whom He begot by communicating to Him His own nature. Then transported at the sight of their common ineffable beauty, He rested with infinite complacency in this Word...

"It is not out of need of love, therefore, that God exacts of man the tribute of his heart, neither is it to increase, and still less, to procure His own bliss, that God loves us... He acts in this way solely out of His infinite bounty, to make manifest His perfections by communicating them to creatures, and to secure His glory

³⁵⁷ B. Froget, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just*, pp. 85-86.

through their happiness.”³⁵⁸ That is what we have to be absolutely convinced of.³⁵⁹

4. *The consequences of divine adoption*

On Holy Saturday, in the *Exsultet*,³⁶⁰ we say, *O felix culpa*, O happy fault! It is actually a little astonishing that the Church would use such an expression in Her liturgy. Yet the Church, inspired by God, sees that charity was reestablished after the sin of our first parents, and that graces were poured over us in abundance.³⁶¹

The fact that God should have willed that we come into His intimacy is a *grace*. That is exactly what the word means, a gratuitous gift: a tremendous, unbelievable grace, one to which we had absolutely no claim. We could perhaps be tempted to say, “But why did God love us so much? He should have just left us with our poor human nature. Why do we need to enter the very nature of God, to be so close to God? It gives us even heavier duties.” Oh yes, it does indeed give us heavier duties. It completely transforms our spirituality, our interior life. We must not see things as we would see them if we had only our human nature. Knowing that we are called to know God directly, to live of Him, to live in Him, we need to have in our hearts a great desire for God. The divine filiation ought to make it your principal concern that all your family be consecrated to God, that nothing in it ever be a scandal driving souls away from God.³⁶²

5. INVITATION TO LIVE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary to make us understand what our supernatural life really is, what that participation in the divine love really is. God knows that she understands it, she who gave natural life to Jesus by the grace of the Holy Spirit. God must have flooded her with spiritual graces and she must be very

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

³⁵⁹ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 1975, 4th conference.

³⁶⁰ *Exsultet* or proclamation from the Easter Vigil.

³⁶¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1980.

³⁶² Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1975.

capable of making us understand how beautiful it is, how great it is, how sweet it is to know God and to live with Him.³⁶³

We ought to strive to live in the presence of God, and often make acts of placing ourselves in the presence of God. By ejaculatory prayers we ought to express to God our gratitude for having created us, for maintaining us in existence, for His presence in us and His help in all our life.³⁶⁴

We need to tell ourselves: "God gave me this extraordinary grace. I don't want to pass it by, I don't want to weaken it, I don't want to be unworthy of it." "Do not neglect the grace which is given to you today." That was written on our Spiritan rosary. It is not tomorrow, it is not the day after tomorrow, it is the grace which is given to you today.³⁶⁵

Sanctifying grace perfects the powers of the soul by the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The study of these habitus is reserved for the second book which concerns man's ascent toward God.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

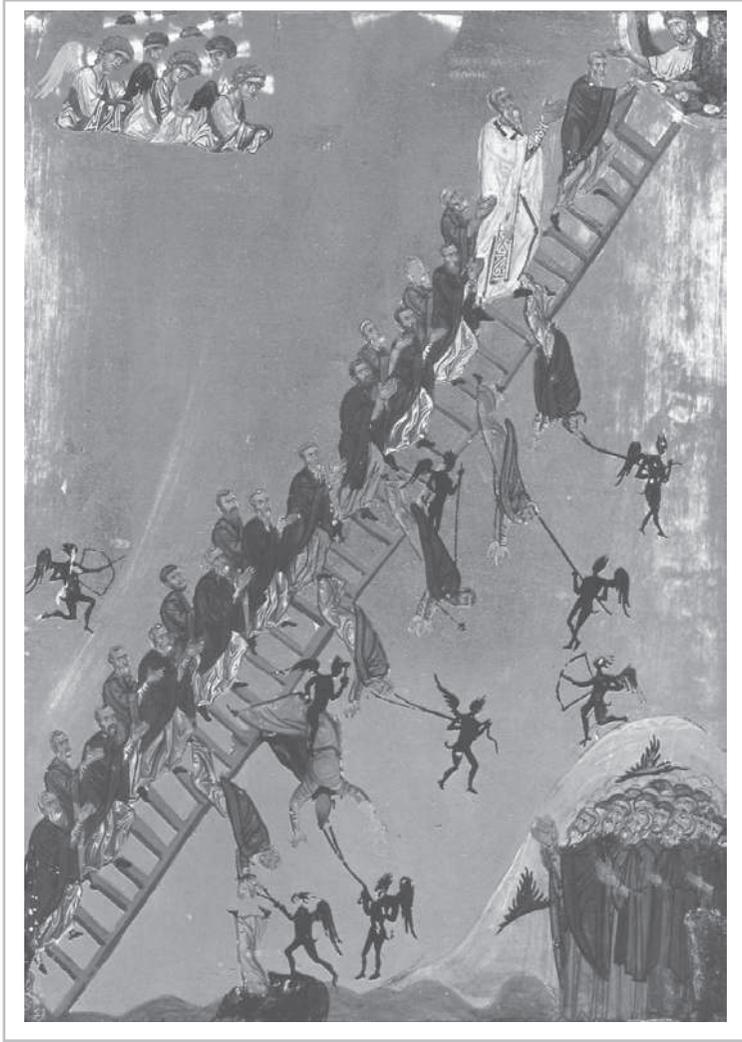
³⁶⁴ Retreat to seminarians, Ecône, September 19, 1978, 5th conference.

³⁶⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 14, 1983.

Book Two

**OUR RESPONSE:
THE CLIMB TOWARD GOD**





The Ladder of Divine Ascent
(12th century icon, St. Catherine Monastery, Mount Sinai)

THE CLIMB TOWARD GOD

We turn now from the contemplation of God to consider the way in which man can unite himself to God. In order to do so, he has to know his weaknesses, his wealth, and also the arms at his disposal. He will thus be able to wage valiantly the good fight against his evil tendencies and develop his good inclinations, sustained by grace from above.

I

THE OBSTACLES TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The dogma of man's fall and that of the Redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ provide the historical starting point of every spiritual life. The first step is to acknowledge a state which is not that of innocence but that of sin.

1.

PERSONAL SINS

1. THE REALITY OF SIN

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.¹

It is stated in Holy Scripture that even the just man sins seven times a day (*Prov. 24:16*). Obviously, that does not mean that we sin gravely, nor even venially, seven times a day, but that we are weak and that at least faults of negligence escape us.²

You have the first Epistle of St. John especially which is very typical on this subject, and which is very clear: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His words are not in us. My little children, these things I write to you in order that you may not sin. But if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just; and He is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world."* (1 John 1:8 - 2:2) It is undeniable; we are sinners.³

2. MORTAL SIN

It is good to meditate on the gravity of sin and on the condition of a soul in the state of sin, separated from God, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, and who is already judged, as our Lord Himself says: *"He who does not believe is already judged"* (*Jn. 3:18*), because he refuses to unite himself to our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴

Sin is no small thing. If we judge it from God's point of view, sin is something infinitely grave because we disobey, we rebel in a way against God, against our Creator, against Him who is our everything. Therefore, the offense is very grave. Even in human relations, it is obviously less grave to have a conflict with a simple police officer than with the head of State. And there is no greater authority, no more perfect authority than God's own. So we cannot conceive of anything more grave than putting ourselves in conflict with God Himself.

We can compare mortal sin to a murder or to a suicide. In one way or another, mortal sin always goes against life. God is Life. It is He who gave us life, He is the source of life and He wills for us

¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 21, 1977, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 266.

² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 5th conference.

³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 22, 1977.

⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 16, 1980.

both temporal life and eternal life. But mortal sin is contrary to life. To blaspheme, for example, is to insult God, it is to despise Him publicly, violently; it is to kill oneself; it is as if we cut off our existence at its source. Out of pity, God allows someone who publicly blasphemes to continue living. Normally He ought to send the person immediately to hell, but out of patience, out of goodness, God hopes that the person will convert before his death. But if he keeps going in that direction, he is committing suicide, he is killing his soul in a way, if his soul could die. He is killing it by putting it in hell, that is, by separating it definitively from God.

It is the same thing for all mortal sins, such as murder for example, or even a very large theft. A family has a little money set aside which will maybe allow it to survive for the next six months. A thief comes and he goes to the safe or to the place where that money is kept, he gathers it up and he leaves. He is killing the family in a certain way. On the other hand, if he steals a small amount of money, ten or twenty dollars for example, he is not killing the family, he is only upsetting them.

Sins against the sixth and ninth commandments likewise go against life. By these sins, we are killing life.

It is the same thing when we cause serious damage to somebody's reputation. We have a right to our reputation; it is a good which permits us to live in society. That is why destroying somebody's reputation amounts to killing him in a way – sometimes even with backbiting, but all the more so with calumny. We are destroying the reputation of an honest man. For example, a whole village is going to believe now that that man is dishonest. It is as though we had killed him in a certain way. On the other hand, if we tell just one person things which are not true, but everything stays completely private and the things are not very serious, then the sin is not going to be mortal but venial because it is not completely breaking off relations with that person, and it is not causing damage to his life in society.

So, mortal sin is an attack on life; it is to go against God, whether indirectly, in whatever may damage the life of men in their reputation, their goods, their body; or else directly, by sacrilege and blasphemy. All those things go against life. After a sin like one of those, we cannot be in agreement with God. If we attack the life which God has given to men and which He wills to give them, then we are putting ourselves in opposition to God.

That is why the Church excommunicates people who pass laws against life, for example laws permitting abortion or divorce.⁵

Our Lord sent a chill through mankind when He said to those who commit mortal sins, “Whoever does such things will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven; they will be on My left hand and will be thrown into eternal fire” (cf. Mt. 25:33-46). When we reread these words in the Gospel, it is definitely chilling. If there is a certain servile fear to be awakened in our souls, it is definitely the fear of sin. But obviously it is much better to instill a filial fear in souls by showing them how much our Lord has loved us.⁶ When we consider what our Lord has done out of love for us, dying on the cross for us, how can we possibly keep sinning against God or causing pain to our Lord?⁷

3. VENIAL SIN

We also have to be careful to avoid venial sin because, even if a venial sin does not separate us definitively from God, it still creates a little false note between our Lord and us.⁸

As Dom Marmion says in *Christ: Ideal of the Monk*, “When it is a question of perfection, we must carefully distinguish between venial sin and venial sin. A venial sin, a sin of surprise, which escapes us from weakness, cannot keep us back in our seeking after God; we rise from it with humility, and find in the remembrance of it a new stimulus for loving God the more. But bear this well in mind, it is quite otherwise with venial sin, habitual or fully deliberate. When a soul regularly commits deliberate venial sins,... it is impossible for this soul to make true and constant progress in perfection.

“It is not our weaknesses, our infirmities of body or mind that impede the action of grace; God knows our misery and remembers that we are dust. But it is a disposition that, so to speak, paralyses God’s action within us; it is the attachment to our own

⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 4th conference.

⁶ Servile fear is the fear of chastisements whereas filial fear refers to the fear of displeasing one whom we love. *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 19, a. 9.

⁷ Priests’ retreat, Ecône, September 1982, 7th conference.

⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 4th conference.

judgment and self-love, which is the most fruitful source of our infidelities and deliberate faults.”

“A few days before His blessed Passion our Divine Saviour beholding Jerusalem began to weep over the city (*Lk. 19:41*). ‘*How often would I have gathered together thy children,*’” to Me, to My Father! “‘*and thou wouldst not*’: *Et noluisti* (*Mt. 23:37*). Weigh well this word: *noluisti*. When our Lord meets with resistance, even in small matters, He feels, so to speak, the powerlessness of His work in the soul. Why is this? Because this soul fosters habits which form and maintain obstacles to Divine union. God would communicate Himself, but these barriers prevent the fullness of His action; He finds no response to His Divine advances; the soul, day by day says ‘no’ to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit who urges it to obedience, humility, charity and self-forgetfulness. It is then impossible for it to make any real progress.”

“Not only does this soul no longer mount towards God, but it is much to be feared that it will fall into grave sins.”⁹

We have to think about what Dom Marmion says. If we truly want to advance in virtue, it is extremely important that we not set ourselves deliberately in opposition to the action of the Holy Spirit in our souls. We have to avoid what is contrary to the love of God. They are not grave sins, but there is a kind of paralysis that settles into our souls.¹⁰

So, when we fall into a sin of weakness, as sadly we all do, since we are sinners every one of us, let us ask forgiveness of God right away, right after we have sinned; let us turn toward Him; let us renew our resolution to do everything we can to avoid sin, to obey His law, to do our duty, to aim again toward Heaven.¹¹

4. LUKEWARMNESS

We have to have a detestation for deliberate venial sins because in us they are already a willful stand against the law of God. Certainly, these are not yet sinful actions that cut us off from Him

⁹ Dom C. Marmion, *Christ: The Ideal of the Monk*, p. 151.

¹⁰ Retreat for religious, Brignoles, July 26, 1984, 8th conference.

¹¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 4th conference.

entirely, but when they start to be frequent, they cause us to be lukewarm.¹²

As all spiritual authors tell us, a man who is not moving forward is moving backward. We cannot tread water; we are fooling ourselves. If there is no more striving after perfection, our soul becomes tepid. And tepidity is the great sickness of our souls.¹³

Remember what our Lord said to the angel of the church of Laodicea: "*Because thou art lukewarm, I am about to vomit thee out of My mouth*" (Apoc. 3:16). God does not want us to be on the fence, to appear hesitating: "I love You, but I don't love You that much; a little bit, but not much; I love myself also - I can't help it..." and we are always on the fence, always hesitating in our love of God. That can only be displeasing to our Lord who proved His love for us so undeniably. So we have to do everything we can to avoid venial sin, and I think that there is no greater motive for noble souls to reach that point than to meditate on the love of our Lord for us.¹⁴

2.

THE FOUR WOUNDS

To overcome all obstacles to a full expansion of the life of God in us, man has not only to recognize that he is a sinner but also to discern the wounds which he has inherited from Adam and which remain in him even after baptism.

I would like to draw your attention to what the Church teaches - and St. Thomas Aquinas, the echo of the Church - about the consequences of original sin that remain in us.

Day in and day out, we have to deal with these consequences. If we do not see what they are, then we will spend our whole life not knowing that we have certain sicknesses officially recognized by the Church. If we do not know we are sick, it will never occur

¹² Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

¹³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 9, 1982, 9th conference.

¹⁴ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

to us to try to get better, to go consult the doctor of our souls and ask the Church for the proper remedy for our sicknesses. When we feel sick, we go to find the doctor and we say to him, "I am feeling sick, I am not doing well at all, I have chills, I have a little bit of a fever. Tell me what I should take. What remedy should I take in order to get better?" Well, we are sick, even after the grace of baptism. We have not been completely restored to health.¹⁵

God created Adam and Eve in the state of grace. They were raised to the supernatural order, so they had the divine life in them. They lost it, and at the same time they brought a profound disorder into human nature itself. They unbalanced human nature by their sin, by their disobedience.¹⁶

1. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN

1. *The teaching of St. Thomas*

St. Thomas not only says that we have personal sins, but he also describes the consequences of original sin. It is one of those truths which he expresses in so clear a manner that we should practically learn it by heart, because it is at the foundation of our entire spirituality.

"Original justice was forfeited through the sin of our first parent; so that all the powers of the soul are left, as it were, destitute of their proper order, whereby they are naturally directed to virtue; which destitution is called a wounding of nature."¹⁷ That is something we must never forget. St. Thomas tells us clearly: by original sin, our nature is wounded. And he then explains that this wound spreads into four other wounds, each of which touches our ordering to virtue, meaning, to the four cardinal virtues.¹⁸

St. Thomas continues, "There are four of the soul's powers that can be the subject of virtue, namely, the reason, where prudence resides, the will, where justice is, the irascible, the subject of fortitude, and the concupiscible, the subject of temperance. Therefore in so far as the reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the wound of ignorance; in so far as the will is deprived of its

¹⁵ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 1st conference.

¹⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 12, 1976.

¹⁷ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 85, a. 3.

¹⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 21, 1977.

order to the good, there is the wound of malice; in so far as the irascible is deprived of its order to the arduous, there is the wound of weakness; and in so far as the concupiscible is deprived of its order to the delectable, moderated by reason, there is the wound of concupiscence. Accordingly these are the four wounds inflicted on the whole of human nature as a result of our first parent's sin. But since the inclination to the good of virtue is diminished in each individual on account of actual sin, these four wounds are also the result of other sins, in so far as, through sin, the reason is obscured, especially in practical matters, the will hardened to evil, good actions become more difficult, and concupiscence more impetuous."¹⁹ So it is undeniable that we have in us these consequences of original sin.²⁰

Prudence is wounded by blindness, the blinding of our souls. We no longer see God in all things. Justice is wounded by malice. Selfishness, the disordered attachment to ourselves, makes us fail also in our duties to our neighbor. And then weakness goes against the virtue of fortitude. Rather than exercising fortitude in temptation and in our practice of virtue, we are weak. Finally, temperance is wounded by concupiscence.²¹

So our four cardinal virtues are, in a way, poisoned at the root. At the root of these virtues, there is a disorder which will remain until the end of time. Even the saints carried these wounds. Obviously they put up a fight. They took the means to try to rectify that disorder, but we can never rectify it perfectly. Only in eternity will it be perfectly healed by the perfection of grace.²²

Thus, a man cannot be naturally good for very long without the grace of God because he falls by his own weight, on account of his weaknesses.

We are born with a human nature out of balance. We have to put it back in balance by the grace of our Lord which heals human nature, and at the same time makes us participate in the divine life. We cannot forget that.²³

¹⁹ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 85, a. 3.

²⁰ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 1st conference.

²¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 12, 1987.

²² Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 21, 1977.

²³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 12, 1976.

2. *The teaching of the Council of Trent*

Here is another passage that gives the reason for our weaknesses. It is taken from the Council of Trent. "This holy Synod confesses and perceives that there remains in the baptized concupiscence of an inclination; although this is left to be wrestled with, it cannot harm those who do not consent, but manfully resist by the grace of Jesus Christ. Nay, indeed, 'he who shall have striven lawfully, shall be crowned' (2 Tim. 2:5). This concupiscence, which at times the Apostle calls sin (Rom. 6:12 ff.), the holy Synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin, as truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is from sin and inclines to sin. But if anyone is of the contrary opinion, let him be anathema."²⁴

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* explains this even a little more clearly.

One of the reasons "why bodily infirmity, disease, sense of pain and motions of concupiscence remain after Baptism is that in them we may have the seed and material of virtue from which we shall hereafter receive a more abundant harvest of glory and more ample rewards. When, with patient resignation, we bear all the trials of life, and, aided by the divine assistance, subject to the dominion of reason the rebellious desires of the heart, we ought to cherish an assured hope that if, with the Apostle we shall have fought a good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith, the Lord, the just judge, will render to us on that day a crown of justice which is laid up for us (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Such seems to have been the divine plan with regard to the children of Israel. God delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, having drowned Pharaoh and his hosts in the sea; yet He did not conduct them immediately into the happy land of promise; He first tried them by a variety and multiplicity of sufferings."²⁵

So it is certain that baptism does not completely restore our nature and that there are four wounds in us which remain. And that is going to set the conditions for our whole spiritual life.²⁶

²⁴ DS 1515; DZ 792.

²⁵ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 186.

²⁶ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 1st conference.

2. IGNORANCE AND BLINDNESS

The most devastating of the wounds of original sin seems to be that of ignorance or blindness, meaning, lack of knowledge of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. For eternal life is in that knowledge: *“Now this is everlasting life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ”* (Jn. 17:3). For how could we render to God the love and the worship due to Him, if we are in blindness about Him?²⁷

The New Testament often speaks of this ignorance. St. Paul, in the second Epistle to the Corinthians, says, *“Their minds were darkened... Down to this very day, the veil covers their hearts.”* (2 Cor. 3:14-15) And he tells the Ephesians, *“This, therefore, I say and testify in the Lord, that henceforward you are not to walk as the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding clouded in darkness, estranged from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart”* (Eph. 4:17-18). Why is all that? Because they are attached to the goods and the pleasures of this world.²⁸

1. A naturalistic vision of things

The wound of ignorance explains why we have a hard time seeing God in creatures. We see it already in children and sometimes in those who have been baptized as adults. We are completely destitute of the order which our first parents knew. The intelligence of Adam and Eve was perfectly ordered toward the good. Instinctively they saw the presence of God in all creatures. They could not help seeing that all creation was the effect of the almighty power of God.

But we travel through this world like blind men. We see creatures, we admire things around us, but it is difficult for us to climb always back to the cause, to see the presence of God in all that. How blind we are!

Instead of thinking of the heavenly things that make up our destiny – God, the angels, the saints, whom we ought to make our company, our family – we are drawn toward temporal things: my money, my house, my leisure time, my occupations. Our mind is

²⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 65; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 50.

²⁸ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 2nd conference.

preoccupied by the goods of this world, blinded by goods of the senses.²⁹

We have a very hard time withdrawing our minds from things temporal, material, sensible, to raise ourselves to things spiritual. But we have to admit that the situation is not normal, because after all we are not like the animals, which have no spiritual soul and which are therefore entirely turned toward the earth and toward the goods of this world. We have a soul created in the image of God, and that soul is of course much more important than our body, obviously. That soul is immortal. If God took the trouble to give us a spirit like to His, normally, naturally, our soul would be turned toward God from our earliest childhood. The thought of God ought to be absolutely natural for us.³⁰

But no, we do not look at things supernaturally. We have great difficulty in placing all things under the eyes of God, under the eyes of the faith; seeing things the way they are, and not the way we think they are. Once again, we live in an illusion. If we truly saw things the way God sees them, the way the holy angels see them, the way our guardian angel sees them, the way the elect in Heaven see them, we would be dumbstruck.³¹

So we have a tendency to live in a total illusion, because we do not know God, because we settle for a very vague knowledge of Him and we do not seek to know Him better. We think that is enough for us to live well, for us to be good Christians. But it is very grave to live in that kind of mediocrity, that kind of anesthesia.

We are like the sick person who gets used to his sickness. "I am sick, what do you expect? I don't see very clearly, but I see enough to lead my life; that's enough for me, I'm not looking for anything more than that." Whereas, if we made more of an effort, we could manage to know God better, as the saints show us. The saints realize that they are blind and, far from wanting to remain in that kind of habitual blindness, they are always looking to grow in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of our Lord.³²

²⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

³⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 2nd conference.

³¹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 2nd conference.

³² Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 1st conference.

That is why we have to draw the attention of children, and even those who have been baptized, toward the presence of God, toward God's almighty power, toward the greatness of God, toward the goodness of God. We have to remind them that God exists.³³

2. *Mistaken judgments*

We are so often distracted and so often preoccupied by other things, by the least details of our life, by little preoccupations, by insignificant things. We get lost in them, entangled in a way by the cares of the world. It is exactly what our Lord said in the parable of the seed which is sown. There are not many which truly bear fruit thirty-fold, sixty-fold, or a hundred-fold (*Mt. 13:23*). But there are many that grow among thorns, and the cares of this world smother the seed.

We also have a tendency to give an exaggerated importance to the things that interest us. We put our interest in things that are not worth the trouble and then we exaggerate them: a little event, a little difficulty, a little contradiction, a little suffering, and we turn it into a mountain! But what is that before God? We have to try to put everything back in its place according to its true proportion. We have to strive every day to fight against illusion and against the false estimation of things.

We live in blindness because we never know how to put God in His rightful place in relation to the world, in relation to ourselves, and so we never know how to judge things by their true measure.³⁴

We no longer know how to measure things divine and things human, temporal realities and eternal realities, the spiritual and the material. We no longer know how to measure things accurately. We still have a long way to go in understanding that divine things, eternal things are infinitely superior to all that is passing, to all that is mortal, to all that vanishes.³⁵

³³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 12, 1987.

³⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

³⁵ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1979.

3. *A false appreciation of reality*

If we could truly know a little better who God is, the proper scale of values would put itself right into place. Unfortunately we have a very vague appreciation of ourselves, of men and of things that happen. If we could have the perception that our Lord had by His beatific vision, we would be dumbfounded at how foolish our appreciation of things is, at how ridiculous our manner of seeing really is. At that moment we would realize that what we thought was so important is absolutely insignificant, particularly the goods of this world and even the gifts that God has given us.

Often we appreciate much more the gifts that the world esteems than those that God wants; 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 has a totally different appreciation than God has, or than our Lord may have had when He was on earth.³⁶

Thus we live as blind men who do not see things as they are. That is the first wound: the reason is destitute of its order toward the true; it is the wound of ignorance.³⁷

4. *Remedies for ignorance*

How can we correct our blindness? Well, by reflecting, by praying, by asking God to give us the grace to live in His presence, to see that everything that has been made was made by Him, that everything is an effect of His almighty power, of His goodness, of His charity. May He open our eyes that we might live truly in reality, in truth and not in illusion.³⁸

In order to be in the truth, we have to try to model our understanding as far as possible on that of our Lord, for He said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life*" (Jn. 14:6). If our Lord is the truth, we have to try to open our understanding as much as possible, to form it on the model of His own.³⁹

³⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 274.

³⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1974.

Imagine if we could see things the way God Himself sees them, the way our Lord Jesus Christ saw them when He was on earth. Imagine the thoughts of our Lord, having the beatific vision as He walked among us. Each thing was appreciated at its proper value: the thoughts of men, their actions, the occurrences of every day.⁴⁰

The Blessed Virgin, like her Son, did not have this tendency to live in illusion. She lived in the presence of God. She constantly saw the presence of God in herself, around herself, through creatures, and of course all the more in her Son, who was God Himself.⁴¹

She had lights that were much greater than our own, obviously, by the graces of the Holy Spirit. So she must certainly have lived in that divine atmosphere constantly and been flooded by the presence of God. Of course she had faith. She did not have the beatific vision, unlike our Lord, but she had such a lively faith that she was convinced of the presence of God everywhere and everything carried her toward God. Let us ask her therefore what we should do, how we should try to come a little nearer to that affection that she had for God.⁴²

3. MALICE

“In so far as the will is deprived of its order to the good,” that is to say, does not of itself turn toward the good, “there is the wound of malice.”⁴³ The will is tempted by evil.⁴⁴

1. *The will is made for the good*

God willed to leave us free. He did not have to do it, but He gave us freedom. That is moreover the hallmark of a spiritual nature. By the very fact that God gave man a mind, He created Him free, because He created him intelligent. The intelligence is made in order to know things, and so that man might then will those

⁴⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 273-274.

⁴¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

⁴² Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1985, 4th conference.

⁴³ *Summa Theologica*, I^{II}a^e, q. 85, a. 3.

⁴⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

things freely in order to earn merit. It is the hallmark of the intelligence and the will to be free, but freedom is given to man in order to follow laws, to follow paths traced out by grace.⁴⁵

Just as the intelligence is made for truth, the will is made for the good. The good is truth put into action, in other words, charity: God is truth and charity; they are one and the same thing. That is why His commandments could only be charity. “*On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets*” (Mt. 22:40) It is metaphysically impossible that God command us anything except to love Him and to love one another. Fulfilling this sweet duty is where we are meant to find happiness.⁴⁶

2. *The will attracted by evil*

However, the selfish man repeats the word of Satan: *Non serviam*, “I will not serve, I do not want to love, I only want myself and my passing satisfactions.” The sinner enjoys at the expense of charity those satisfactions which God ordered to the service of charity.

We see malice affecting man “when his inordinate will loves some temporal good, such as riches or pleasure, more than the order of reason or Divine law, or Divine charity.”⁴⁷

So this malice, this disordered will, puts itself in a state of disobedience, a state of abandoning the duty of charity for which man was created, so it becomes impiety and cowardice toward God and injustice toward neighbor, disdain for the rights of our neighbor. Before the rights of God and the rights of neighbor which are expressed in the commandments of charity, this sinner proclaims the rights of Man, the rights of egotism.

It is an overturning of the order established by God: rights are founded on duty, not the other way around. The repulsive horror of malice beside the charm and the beauty of charity!⁴⁸

Since the will is damaged, freedom is too, in a certain way. There is a lessening of that energy of freedom, an energy that ought to carry us instinctively toward the good. Our freedom was

⁴⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 7th conference.

⁴⁶ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁴⁷ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 78, a. 1.

⁴⁸ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

given to us for good and not for evil, but our weakened freedom now threatens to lead us into evil, into disobedience, into forgetfulness of God, into a failure of justice and charity toward our neighbor.⁴⁹

The flesh is made for the spirit and not the spirit for the flesh. And the spirit is made to love God and neighbor. The selfish man overturns the order of things and so becomes the cause of his own death. St. Paul speaks of "*men who in wickedness hold back the truth of God*" (Rom. 1:18), and he adds, "*those who practice such things are deserving of death*" (Rom. 1:32).⁵⁰

3. *A wound visible in children*

We can already see it in children of three or four years old, and even before: instead of doing good things, they disobey. And yet they have been baptized, they no longer have original sin and they are in the state of grace. That is why it would seem that they ought to be naturally inclined toward good things, toward the good. But no, they disobey their parents: "No, I don't want to." The parents could say, "He has been baptized, he has sanctifying grace. Where does he get this tendency to disobey, to go after evil, to annoy his brothers and sisters, to aggravate his parents or even steal things from his brothers and sisters?" He does it because there is a disorder which remains in us after baptism.⁵¹

4. *Invitation to an examination of conscience*

To the extent that we do not adore God, to the extent that we do not fulfill His commandments, we are going against the good of other people. We are stealing the goods of our neighbor, whether it be their honor, their reputation, their virtues, their wealth. This theft is a form of selfishness: we take for ourselves the goods of our neighbor. We want to expropriate the neighbor from his goods and take them for ourselves. Ever since original sin it is a tendency which is so human that we have to examine ourselves constantly to see whether there is not some selfishness in our motives for acting.⁵²

⁴⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1985, 4th conference.

⁵⁰ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁵¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

⁵² Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

I think you have to know how to examine yourself seriously in order to acquire virtues. On this subject, St. Thomas Aquinas studies what vices are opposed to what virtues and he goes into detail.⁵³ For example, on the faults contrary to charity toward God and toward our neighbor, St. Thomas gives a series of recommendations which are really priceless.⁵⁴

5. *The remedy to selfishness: Charity*

The more we persecute our own selfishness – which is an attachment to ourselves, a turning inward upon ourselves, a seeking of our own satisfaction, our own good, our own pleasure – the more we are going to become charity. The grace of God multiplies charity in us to infinity, in an absolutely extraordinary way, since it places in our soul a little seed of the very nature of God, who is charity.⁵⁵

4. WEAKNESS

It is not easy to maintain virtue, the orientation to the good. It is not always easy to obey, to follow the will of God. It requires courage constantly to do what God wills, because we are weak.

We have to shake ourselves up a little bit, push ourselves in order to do the will of God always and never allow ourselves to be tempted by evil.

How is it that we have this tendency to weakness, to let ourselves drift a little bit and be lazy, not to do our duty of state well enough, even though we are in the state of grace, without grave sin on our conscience? Well, that is the wound of weakness which remains in us as a consequence of original sin.⁵⁶

What precisely are the defects opposed to the virtue of fortitude and connected to the wound of weakness? St. Thomas explains that fear is opposed to that part of fortitude which leads us to confront an obstacle: fear of losing goods that are dearer to us than the honor of God.⁵⁷

⁵³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 34 ff.

⁵⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1981.

⁵⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

⁵⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

⁵⁷ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 123.

On the contrary, the overbold man is one who exaggerates in the pursuit of obstacles.

We see defects against other parts of the virtue of fortitude, namely against magnanimity and perseverance.

St. Thomas says that the danger by defect against magnanimity is “pusillanimity, which makes a man fall short of what is proportionate to his power,” by “fear of failure,” by shrinking “from great things” for insufficient reason.⁵⁸

On the contrary, the presumptuous man strives to undertake something which is beyond his capacity.⁵⁹ Another defect is ambition. The ambitious man desires great things, but in a selfish and disordered manner.⁶⁰ Those are other defects which can work against magnanimity.

The vice which is opposed by defect to patience and perseverance is softness: one who does not persevere in the good on account of certain difficulties which he is unable to endure but which should in fact be fairly easy to endure.⁶¹ And as the vice by excess there is pertinacity. The pertinacious man holds to his own opinion, his manner of doing things, whereas it would be reasonable that he yield.⁶² He is also seeking his own interest.

These are all defects opposed to the virtue of fortitude. And we see it very well ourselves, all the time. Sometimes it seems that we are too weak or that we are too presumptuous, and it is always difficult to find the right balance in our daily actions.

Often, rather than firmness, we find instability, moodiness, fear of effort, changeability. There are periods of enthusiasm and periods of depression. We can easily see our weakness in this lack of fortitude, as soon as we encounter new difficulties, unexpected difficulties, difficulties we would never have guessed. We can obviously judge our own fortitude a little bit when something happens to us that we weren't expecting, and it happens to us all of a sudden. There, what is our reaction? Depending on how we react, we can judge our practice of the virtue of fortitude.

⁵⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 133, a. 1 and 2.

⁵⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 130.

⁶⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 131.

⁶¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 138, a. 1. This vice of *mollities* may be translated *effeminacy*. Translator's note.

⁶² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 138, a. 2.

God knows that fortitude is a virtue we all need right at this moment. We are on a battleground. So we have to have that virtue; it is very important because it is the one that allows us truly to accomplish the will of God.⁶³

5. CONCUPISCENCE

Here we are at the last wound. "In so far as the concupiscible is deprived of its order to the delectable, moderated by reason, there is the wound of concupiscence."⁶⁴ The virtue of temperance is wounded in its turn.⁶⁵

1. Intemperance

The first wound is going to be intemperance. And when St. Thomas speaks of intemperance, he means gluttony or excessive drinking.⁶⁶

St. Thomas goes into detail. He gives five kinds of gluttony.⁶⁷ Those who hasten the meal time, those who wish for sumptuous foods or else foods prepared with too much care, those who eat to excess, and finally those who consume their food with insatiable voracity, there are the five kinds of gluttony. And St. Thomas indicates five daughters of gluttony: foolish joy; dullness of mind instead of vigilance; loquacity, letting your tongue run on in every direction; uncleanness; buffoonery; and finally, stupidity.⁶⁸ So let us avoid the sin of gluttony so we don't have to deal with its offspring.⁶⁹

2. Lust

The second wound is lust. Our desires are carried toward sense pleasures with inordinate impetuosity. It would seem that the greatest disorder in human nature is in this domain of carnal desires.

⁶³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

⁶⁴ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 85, a. 3

⁶⁵ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

⁶⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 148 and 150.

⁶⁷ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 148, a. 4.

⁶⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 148, a. 6.

⁶⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

St. Thomas explains it in the following manner. The pleasures of touch are at the root of all of the other senses and are therefore the most attractive, for they are the most natural to the body, to its conservation and its propagation. As a result of the wound of concupiscence left by sin, the desires which lead us to seek these pleasures have become particularly impetuous and anarchical. If they are abandoned without control to the impulses of man, they are capable of drowning out his reason entirely and leading him to the worst excess.

St. Thomas then shows the consequences of lust. "When the lower powers are strongly moved toward their objects, the result is that the higher powers are hindered and disordered in their acts." This happens especially for lust which arouses a desire and provokes a pleasure that are so vehement, that they throw the reason and the will into disorder.

It first affects the simple understanding by "blindness of mind"; secondly, deliberation on the means to use, by rashness; thirdly, the judgment on what should be done and not done, and that is thoughtlessness. Those attack especially the virtue of prudence. Lust renders man totally imprudent, incapable of making prudent judgments.

Fourth, lust hinders the command about the thing to be done, by inconstancy.

Then St. Thomas adds that lust produces in the will "a two-fold inordinate act." It provokes selfishness, because a man wants a disordered pleasure. And finally, which is more grave, perhaps ultimately the gravest of all, it provokes "love of this world," with a horror of death and of spiritual and eternal joys.⁷⁰

We can see it for ourselves, those people who are given over to lust and to all the carnal pleasures are unable to raise themselves toward spiritual realities. And when the hour of death comes, then they are terrified, horrified, obviously! They no longer have an awareness or a desire of spiritual things, of the things of Heaven. They have become completely earthbound, completely submerged in the material. So really we have to make an effort to keep away from these faults.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 153, a. 5.

⁷¹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

We have to be completely convinced that all of Christian life is a struggle, a continual combat demanding a constant vigilance.

No one is exempted from feeling the spur of temptation. Rare are those who only succumb venially if we take Christians as a whole and throughout their whole life. We need to be aware of it, not turn a blind eye to our miseries, not believe that we are the only ones who have temptations, not imagine the saints as having no difficulties or trials – so that we don't let ourselves be troubled, or worry, or panic: which is exactly what the devil wants. At the same time, let us never forget that God will give His grace in the moment of difficulty, of temptation; let us therefore walk straight ahead with confidence, with prudence, vigilance.⁷²

3. *Anger*

The third wound is anger. It is a passion that pushes us to avenge offenses, with more or less violent emotion. It is bad to the degree that it does not obey reason. Wrath, sullenness, implacability are parts of anger. The wrathful “are angry too quickly and for any slight cause.” The sullen hold the injury too long in their memory. The implacable hold obstinately to their desire for revenge.⁷³

That is all St. Thomas, you know. His definitions are so simple, so clear, so straightforward!

Our Lord gave us advice on this subject in the Sermon on the Mount. In St. Matthew, we read, “*You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Thou shalt not kill’; and that whoever shall kill shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Thou fool!’, shall be liable to the fire of Gehenna.*” (Mt. 5:21-22)

I suppose our Lord is referring to someone who says it with a sentiment of implacability, of rancor, with the intention of wanting revenge. That man is certainly committing a mortal sin against his neighbor, in his heart. Unfortunately these interior sentiments are very common.⁷⁴

⁷² Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁷³ *Summa Theologica*, II^oII^{ae}, q. 158, a. 5.

⁷⁴ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

4. Curiosity

The last wound is curiosity. It is a kind of intellectual gluttony and a gluttony of sense knowledge. St. Thomas says that knowledge is bad if it makes a man prideful.⁷⁵ “*Knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies*” (1 Cor. 8:1). “St. Augustine says, ‘Some there are who forsaking virtue, and ignorant of what God is, and of the majesty of that nature which ever remains the same, imagine they are doing something great, if with surpassing curiosity and keenness they explore the whole mass of this body which we call the world. So great a pride is thus begotten, that one would think they dwelt in the very heavens about which they argue.’”⁷⁶ You can see the defects that St. Thomas is indicating, from this wound of intemperance.⁷⁷

6. THE STARTING POINT OF SANCTIFICATION

The knowledge of our defects seems to me very important for knowing how to proceed in our spiritual life. Once again, we cannot hope to be healed, hope to be in a “normal state,” if we do not know that we are sick, that we are deprived of the true order for which we were created.

To my mind, I don’t think there has been enough emphasis put on this truth that really conditions our whole spiritual life. It is important to realize it in order to stir up in ourselves the desire to find normalcy as far as we can – that is, to find holiness.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 167, a. 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Priests’ retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

⁷⁸ Priests’ retreat, Ecône, September 2, 1985, 1st conference.

II

THE SPIRITUAL COMBAT

Acquiring the holiness we need to save our souls is no simple thing. Indeed, our daily experience and the doctrine of the Church teach us that even though the grace of baptism gives us back sanctifying grace by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and frees us from original sin and the diabolic presence, it does not free us from all of the consequences of original sin. These consequences explain why our spiritual life takes on the tones of a spiritual combat which is going to last our whole life here below.⁷⁹

1.

THE MOTIVES OF THE COMBAT

On account of the damages left in us by original sin, we have a tendency, as we have just seen, to let ourselves be carried along by the current of the life of the body, of the life of the senses, and not focus our efforts on what is essential, the life of our soul. So it is important to reflect on the motives that ought to inspire us to take our spiritual life seriously.⁸⁰

1. FOUR REASONS IN THE NATURAL ORDER

What is the first reason to take our spiritual life seriously? It is the very reason of our existence, that for which God created us.

⁷⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 64; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 49.

⁸⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

Our end is essentially a spiritual end: “*He made us and not we ourselves*” (Ps. 99:3). Therefore, God willed an end for us, and that end is essentially spiritual.

Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “*God is spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth*” (Jn. 4:24). We always have to bear in mind that we are spiritual creatures and try to foster the conviction that the spiritual world exists, that it is much more important, much more real, much more true, so to speak, than the material world, than the sensible world. We cannot forget that matter comes from the spirit and not the contrary, as people would like to have us believe today.⁸¹

The material world came from the spiritual world, and it is the spiritual world which is and which will be the definitive reality. Even our body, which is material, will one day become spiritual. St. Paul says it: *corpus spirituale* (1 Cor. 15:44). Everything is going to resolve into the spiritual. So what we do not see is more real than what we do see. Those are things to consider. God, who is spirit, cannot be seen and yet He is infinitely more rich in reality than any creature. We have to aspire to build a personal contact with Him. That desire is not beyond the power of grace. God Himself desires it for you. And you, too, have to desire it for your sanctification.⁸²

Secondly, you also need to take your spiritual life seriously because the end for which God created us is necessarily going to be our happiness.

But don't we have a tendency not to give God the place He actually holds in our lives, and so not to seek the end that God wills to give us – that is, our own happiness? We know that our final end is going to be eternal happiness or eternal sadness. We can't just vanish. We cannot fall back into nothingness. It is not possible. Once God has created us and given us a soul, it's for eternity. Our soul is immortal. So what do we intend to do with it? Do we really have a desire to seek its happiness?

You should thirdly because God only acts by charity. Consequently, it is His love, His charity which created me and which presses me on to reach my end, which is my own happiness. Are we going to refuse the love of God?

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

Again, we need to take our spiritual life seriously, and this is going to be the fourth reason, because God is not mocked. In any case, as the Psalmist says, God is holding us in existence (*Ps. 138*). We cannot be separated from Him. We can do as we choose, go where we choose, think what we choose: God is there; He is carrying us.

So, the more we live in reality, the more impossible it is going to become for us not to take our spiritual life seriously. God is too great and too good for us to offer Him that insult of refusing to know Him and refusing to love Him.

And there I have given you only the natural reasons.⁸³

2. REASONS IN THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER

If we come to the supernatural reasons, there are still other, infinitely greater motives for taking our spiritual life seriously.

If we are not moved at seeing the way in which God willed to resolve the problem of our redemption, by becoming man, by taking on a flesh like our own, in shedding all of His blood for us, it is because we do not know God. We do not realize what God is.

If we realized, we would be dumbfounded at thinking He should have become one of us. Logically, if I may say, it is inconceivable, absolutely inconceivable! That God should have become a poor creature, have taken a poor, mortal body, with senses, subject to suffering, to hunger, to fatigue – God? No, it is not possible! The mysteries of the Incarnation and of the Redemption are definitely great mysteries, mysteries of our faith! God did all that out of love for us. Is it for us a source of constant gratitude toward Him?⁸⁴

⁸³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

2.

THE AMPLITUDE OF THE COMBAT

Until our last breath, we are going to have to do battle. Already there is everything inside of us that pushes us to sin. Then there is everything around us. And there is Satan, the devil, who is also there and who works by every possible means to make us fall into sin.⁸⁵

1. THE COMBAT AGAINST THE OLD MAN

1. *The victory over self*

St. Ignatius tells us we have to conquer ourselves because very often we have thoughts, activities which are not in conformity with the will of God. They are still under the influence of the one who was in us before baptism. Self-possession is a quality that is indispensable. With the grace of God, of course! We cannot have it without grace, but in our own activity we have to be always aiming for it. We have to examine ourselves to know in what sector of our activity we are not masters of ourselves. And we can notice it when we do things that are against the will of God. Sometimes, unfortunately, those things are by our own consent. Then our will is submitting to the devil's influence, and the devil is the one commanding.

So we have to strive for that self-possession, that mastery of self. It is a state of being that is extremely important in our relations with others. We possess ourselves when we are capable of submitting entirely our activity, our life, our day, our goods, our thoughts to our Lord. That is the goal to aim for.

And we have to seek it in the smallest examples of our life and not in extraordinary things. It is in the details of our life that we see that we are not yet masters of ourselves and that we are not yet placing all of our activity under the influence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 7, 1982.

So we have to reconquer ourselves in a way, because by original sin we have taken possession of something which does not belong to us. So we have to dispossess ourselves and win ourselves back in order to give ourselves completely to our Lord. For that, we are going to need generosity every single day: not just once, not just twice. Every day, we have to ask ourselves: "In what domains do I take myself for my own master, as though I belonged to myself?"

From this point of view, the prayers of Prime are full of meaning. Every morning, they put us totally in the hands of our Lord. They make us beg our Lord to help us to be totally under His motion, under His dependence.

The hymn of Prime is admirable. We beg God that all the acts of our day might be sheltered from anything that may harm us.

And the Church goes into detail. "May our tongues be restrained, keeping far away the horror of discord," so that no violent dispute arise among us. The tongue is often the instrument of such a thing. It is easy to get angry during a conversation; we lose our self-control and we say things we may regret later, but which set off that opposition between souls, between hearts.

"May our eyes be veiled," so we won't be attached to the vanities of the world: honor, glory, money, material goods, a good reputation... There are so many things that can turn us away from our Lord!

"May every heart be deeply pure." May there be no hatred, no ill will in our hearts toward our neighbor.

"May our proud flesh be subdued." How many souls go to hell for those sins of the flesh, that casting away of all discipline, all mortification, all penance!

"May we be moderate in food and drink."

The Church is a Mother who knows us better than we know ourselves. She knows very well that we are lacking in these areas. We let ourselves be dragged along by so many weaknesses, so many evil tendencies, which mean that we are not subject to our Lord Jesus Christ.

"That when the day is gone, and night follows in its due course, having kept ourselves from the cares of the world, we may sing the glory of God." It is so beautiful, this desire that we ex-

press every morning! For it to come true, we need to keep a constant watch over ourselves.⁸⁶

2. *War on mortal sin*

The one thing we have to destroy at all cost is the habit of grave sin or the permanence in the state of grave sin.

Here, we have to tell ourselves again and meditate unceasingly on the gravity of mortal sin, in view of its consequences.

We ought to have before our eyes two subjects of meditation, which reveal the nearly infinite gravity of serious sin. Adam and Eve's one sin of disobedience had two consequences, and just seeing them should be enough to keep us far away from grave sin.

The first consequence: all of the evils, the most horrific we can imagine, that have been unleashed on their descendants, including hell itself. The history of humanity is the history of sufferings, of wars, of illnesses, of the cruelty of men toward one another, of death, but especially moral miseries, sealed in an eternity of fire: a single sin set in motion all of those countless misfortunes.

The second consequence: the death of God on the cross, a death considered by God Himself as the only appropriate means to counteract the effects of sin and to give spiritual life, and one day bodily life, back to those who believe in Him and who receive from Him the grace of divine life, prelude to eternal life.

Let us ask our Lady of Sorrows what that Passion was, what that death was; may she help us to sound the depths of the pain and the charity of this God crucified in the body which He deigned to receive from her.

A single sin brought about the Passion and the crucifixion of the Word Incarnate! May these considerations make us avoid grave sin, and in case of a fall, make us cling to the life-raft which is the sacrament of penance.

There again our holy Mass appears, the sacrifice of the cross, raised as the sign of salvation and of victory over Satan, over sin, over death, over the world. "Death has died"; "hail cross, our one hope"; "by this sign you will conquer."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 20, 1976; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 220-222.

⁸⁷ *Mors mortua tunc est; ave crux, spes unica* (hymn of the *Vexilla Regis*); in hoc

3. *War on venial sin*

We have to tell ourselves, “If I do not fight against my faults, I will gradually wind up living constantly in a state of venial sin.” And venial sin is already a disobeying of God. We tell a white lie, nothing serious, of course. It is not a mortal sin, it is a venial sin which is forgiven by a good Communion, or by good act of contrition. But if we are not careful, the danger is that we get comfortable living in a state of venial sin, if we can call it that.

We don’t keep a handle on our mood, we are easily aggravated and then we lose our temper. We speak unpleasantly to other people, or else we make rash judgments. You know, it is easy to make rash judgments. Someone arrives late for an appointment and we say to ourselves, “Oh, she’s late! What can she have been doing?” She may have a good reason, but right away we accuse her in our mind: “That’s no surprise, she’s always like that.” That is how we make a rash judgment. And we get used to thinking that way. We judge everybody. These rash judgments can be venial sins because it is a lack of charity. And then we run the risk of sharing our rash judgments with other people, and suddenly it is backbiting if the things we are saying are true. If we are spreading rumors that are false, it becomes calumny. But that backbiting in a light matter is already a venial sin.

We run the risk of living that way, multiplying venial sins, if we are not making a continual effort at self-discipline. And what is the means to be always watchful? Our forefathers call it compunction, in their spiritual vocabulary, that is to say, the recognition of our faults, of our weaknesses, of our wrongs against God. We ask pardon of God and by the very fact we make an effort not to fall back into sin.⁸⁸

4. *The combat against our evil tendencies*

We have to fight against sin, against our evil tendencies, mortify ourselves, do penance, if we want charity to reign in us. And certainly you do wish for it, you desire it. So it is a difficult effort we have to maintain throughout our life, in recollection, in piety. You have to take the time to examine yourselves, to examine your

signo vinces. Itinéraire Spirituel, pp. 79-80; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 62-63.

⁸⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

conscience, to know what you really are before God and act in such a way that where there was a vice, a virtue comes to take its place; where there was an evil tendency, a good one comes to take its place. That is what you need to strive after in order to have that firm grounding in charity.⁸⁹

Our Christian life is too often formalistic, exterior. It is not practical or profound enough. Do I ask myself if I am changing, if I am deepening my understanding of truths, if I am practicing them? Aren't there many domains in myself which are not animated by the spiritual? We don't actually want the light to penetrate too deeply so we don't have to change a particular habit, one that we suspect is a little bit bad but that we still want to keep. No! There must be no domain which is "my property." I have to ask God with all my heart and all my will for light in every domain, to have generosity and tear out anything which is not pleasing to Him.⁹⁰

We are unfortunately so far from God. Our minds and our hearts are so attached to the things of this world, so absorbed by our thoughts, our desires, our projects. What we have, our reputation, what people think of us, what people say about us - all those things preoccupy us much more than God does. Ah, if we could only be more detached! That is perhaps the main effort which you can and you must make. You have to detach yourselves from the goods of this world, from honors, from reputation; detach yourselves from your own thoughts, your own desires; and abandon yourselves into the hands of Providence, into the hands of God, in order to give yourselves entirely to Him; in order from now on to have only the interests of our Lord Jesus Christ in your heart and in your soul.⁹¹

Beyond the wounds present in every man since original sin and which he has to take into account in order to remain faithful to God, man also has to avoid the traps of the world and the snares of the devil.

2. THE TRAPS OF THE WORLD

Opposite this spiritual life that our Lord wishes to give us, and the presence of the Holy Trinity that He wants us to have

⁸⁹ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1979.

⁹⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 29, 1972.

⁹¹ Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1974.

within ourselves, there stands the world. We sense that our Lord is aware of the danger that the world represents for our salvation. So He puts us on our guard against the spirit of the world.⁹²

If we read the Gospel, we notice that our Lord speaks of the world in terms which startle us a little bit and make us reflect. We cannot pass over words like those without wanting to know their deeper significance. Our Lord said, "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before you*" (Jn. 15:18). So what world does our Lord mean here?⁹³

There is more than one meaning to *world*. If you take the *world* in the material sense, that is, the stars, the sky, the earth, everything that the earth holds except for sin – God made that world, and therefore it is good. But the world has another meaning in Scripture. The world of which our Lord is speaking is the world of sin, the world of these sinful men who use badly what God created, who use it for their own pleasure and not for the glory of God. That is the world He meant, when our Lord said that He did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9). Our Lord prays for people's conversion, but not for the world, which is completely drowning in sin. Our Lord said, "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before you... No servant is greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also*" (Jn. 15:18, 20), because by your behavior, by your example, you are condemning them. You are showing obedience and charity toward God, charity toward neighbor, and the world does not like that. The world wants to be free, the world refuses all submission, it wants to follow nothing but its own will, its own desires. For the world, it is out of the question to be subject to God, to any authority, to any law which places an obligation. It wants total freedom, a freedom which is not the true freedom; which is the slavery of the passions, the slavery of sin.⁹⁴

The world means everything here below which can draw us into sin. It is not only sin but the occasions of sin. Those are all the scandals of the world.⁹⁵

⁹² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, March 31, 1989, 8th conference.

⁹³ Tonsure retreat, Ecône, February 1, 1983, 2nd conference.

⁹⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 5th conference.

⁹⁵ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 9, 1982.

Our Lord tells us, "*Woe to the world because of scandals!*" (Mt. 18:7) Behind this world is Satan. That is why our Lord cursed it. Evil spirits are everywhere. They maintain the world in sin. That world we just have to flee.⁹⁶

It is true that there was the age of Christendom, when the devil was held more or less at bay. Families, civil societies, the Church, all strove to help souls to practice the Christian virtues. Now, on the contrary, everything is in league in the world to make us lose the wisdom of the cross, the wisdom of God, and to launch us into the folly of the world, into this insane world.⁹⁷

Christian life is more and more difficult to practice in the environment we live in today and it demands a great deal of courage, a great deal of virtue, to manage to practice the law of God in the middle of all the temptations, all the scandals of this world. God knows if the power of the devil is strong today to try to make us fall into sin, to try to turn us away from God, with all the means that men themselves have put in the devil's hands.⁹⁸

St. John states that "*all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life*" (1 John 2:16). The concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life are his way of naming everything that is of that world. We need to remind ourselves of these things.⁹⁹

When St. John tells us that he who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God (1 John 2:15), he means that those who are friends of this world of sin, of this world which is filled with concupiscence, are turning away from God. Indeed, it is not possible to be both a friend of God and to turn away from Him by all the actions of our life. So there has to be a choice.¹⁰⁰

The world and our daily occupations often distract us from the thought of God, and they are like an obstacle and a screen between us and God on account of the disorder which is in us, as I explained to you when I spoke to you about original sin and its consequences. So the creatures which surround us very often hinder us from going to God. That is why there is a need to turn

⁹⁶ Tonsure retreat, Ecône, February 1, 1983.

⁹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 7, 1982.

⁹⁸ Sermon, confirmation, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

⁹⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 22, 1977.

¹⁰⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1979.

away from the world.¹⁰¹

The world and all of its distractions exercise an attraction on minds, on imaginations, on hearts, on souls. Even in Catholic communities, unfortunately, people are oriented toward those goods, toward money.¹⁰²

You see for yourselves that it is not easy. You know well enough the occasions of sin which there are in the world. It is not easy. So we have to be vigilant all the time and be on our guard.¹⁰³

St. Paul said, "*I do not want to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world*" (cf. Gal. 6:14). It is the introit of the Mass of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. It shows very well that the cross is how we die to the world. The cross is what is going to help us lose all desire to have anything to do with this world of sin, with this world which draws us far from God, far from Heaven, far from eternal life.¹⁰⁴

3. THE SNARES OF THE DEVIL

1. *The existence of devils*

We can very well not think of angels, not think of devils, live our life as though they did not exist. We would be living an illusion. We create an unreal world for ourselves, because the real world is the world of angels, of devils; that world which fills Heaven and fills the earth, as well, because each one of us has a guardian angel.¹⁰⁵

2. *Satan's kingdom against the kingdom of Jesus*

In time as in eternity, the kingdom of Satan stands in opposition to that of our Lord. Satan is not the head of the wicked in the sense that he can communicate evil interiorly as Jesus Christ communicates the good, but he is their head in the sense that, in

¹⁰¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 14, 1983.

¹⁰² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 1st conference.

¹⁰³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 9, 1982, 8th conference.

¹⁰⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 5th conference.

¹⁰⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 9, 1987.

the order of exterior government, he tends to turn men from God, as Jesus Christ tends to order them toward Himself; and in the sense that all those who sin imitate the rebellion of Satan and his pride, as the good imitate the submission and the obedience of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶

We will never really understand the struggle between the good and the wicked throughout the events of history, if we don't trace it back to that personal battle, that death-struggle, between Satan and Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷

Wherever our Lord is, devils are there also, around Him. We saw it when He was traveling the roads of Palestine. Devils surrounded Him; they would have liked to keep Him from speaking. And so, wherever light is to be found here below, there will also be darkness. We have to wait for Heaven to be in a light without darkness.¹⁰⁸

The reign of Satan has perhaps never been spread as broadly as it is today. He has penetrated everywhere, in every domain; he surrounds us everywhere. What is the reign of Satan? It is the reign of scandal, but scandal taken in the proper sense of the term, that is, in the sense of what leads us to sin and consequently leads us to hell. Scandal is what draws to sin. And the modern world is truly the kingdom of scandal. Everything is scandalous all around us, everything is contrary to the law of God. In society, the commandments of God are not just being ignored, they are being attacked, publicly, officially. Laws are drawn up that are contrary to the laws of God. Judges, doctors, are obliged to do things which are unjust, horrific, abominable, absolutely contrary to the law of God. All those things are happening at a time when supposedly our civilization has never been so great, never been so beautiful. On the contrary, this civilization bears the mark of Satan, the mark of hell.

So you will denounce these scandals, to keep souls from moving toward hell. You will have no fear of denouncing anything which may drag souls into sin.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 8, a. 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 51-52; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁸ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1976.

¹⁰⁹ Sermon, Ecône, October 29, 1978.

3. *The attacks of the devil*

St. Paul said, “*Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high*” (Eph. 6:12). So we must not expect to have peace. The nearer we draw to our Lord, obviously, we are going to be attacked as He was, it’s normal.¹¹⁰

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* speaks of devils in its commentary on the petition of the *Our Father*, “*Lead us not into temptation.*”

“From all this we may understand that the power of these enemies is great, their courage undaunted, their hatred of us enormous and unmeasured; that they also wage against us a perpetual war, so that with them there can be no peace, no truce. How great is their audacity is evidenced by the words of Satan, recorded by the Prophet: ‘*I will ascend into heaven*’ (Is. 14:13). He attacked our first parents in Paradise; he assailed the Prophets; he beset the Apostles in order, as the Lord says in the Gospel, ‘*that he might sift them as wheat*’ (Lk. 22:31). Nor was he abashed even by the presence of Christ the Lord Himself. His insatiable desire and unwearyed diligence St. Peter therefore expressed when he said: ‘*Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion goeth about, seeking whom he may devour*’ (1 Pet. 5:8)...

“There are many who, because they do not feel the assaults of demons against them, imagine that the whole matter is fictitious; nor is it surprising that such persons are not attacked by demons, to whom they have voluntarily surrendered themselves. They possess neither piety nor charity, nor any virtue worthy of a Christian; hence they are entirely in the power of the devil, and there is no need of any temptation to overcome them, since their souls have already become his willing abode.

“But those who lead a heavenly life upon earth, are the chief objects of the assaults of Satan. Against them he harbors bitterest hatred, laying snares for them each moment.

“Sacred Scripture is full of examples of holy men who, in spite of their firmness and resolution, were perverted by his violence or fraud. Adam, David, Solomon and others, whom it would

¹¹⁰ Retreat, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

be tedious to enumerate, experienced the violent and crafty cunning of demons, which neither human prudence nor human strength can overcome. Who, then, can deem himself sufficiently secure in his own resources? Hence the necessity of offering to God pure and pious prayer, that He suffer us not to be tempted above our strength, but make issue with temptation, that we may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13)."¹¹¹

So the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* reminds us that there are devils and that we should not be surprised at the attacks from them which we have to undergo, precisely because we are aiming to reduce their reign to nothingness and to proclaim the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We should not be surprised that the devil seeks by all possible means to turn us away from spiritual fervor, to do everything to keep us from leading this great battle against him and to keep us from spreading the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ in us and around us.

So do not be too astonished if sometimes you have these feelings of discouragement. Think about the fact that devils exist and take into account their existence.¹¹²

1. The strategy of the devils and our response

Devils use everything sensible and delectable to deepen our wounds. What happened to Eve continues to happen now. At the suggestion of the devil, Eve saw that the fruit was "*fair to the eyes and delightful*" (Gen. 3:6). She would say to God - too late, alas! - "*The serpent deceived me*" (Gen. 3:13).

That is why the Church in all of Her spirituality is so insistent on turning away from the world and its spirit, and seeking only things eternal, in the footsteps of Jesus and Jesus crucified.¹¹³

2. No quarter in the battle against Satan

What duty falls to every man faced with this radical and perpetual battle of the two opposing leaders of humanity? Never to form any kind of alliance with anything having to do with Satan

¹¹¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, pp. 568-569.

¹¹² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 9, 1987.

¹¹³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 65-66; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 51.

or with his minions; and to align ourselves under the standard of Jesus Christ, that we may fight there valiantly forever.¹¹⁴

Even if the world were entirely subject to the forces of Satan and to the forces of the enemies of the Church, we would continue to proclaim the royalty of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not because the numbers are against us, or because Satan has managed to dominate the world, in a way, that we have to accept the reign of Satan and make a compromise with his kingdom, saying, "From now on we accept that Satan reign over certain societies and to a certain extent over the world." We cannot accept the reign of Satan. We tolerate it as long as we cannot do otherwise, but in our hearts, we tell ourselves with an ardent desire, "The day we can drive Satan out, we will do it, even at the price of our blood, that our Lord Jesus Christ might reign."¹¹⁵

3.

THE DISPOSITIONS FOR COMBAT

1. COMPUNCTION

Your attachment to our Lord, your love for Him, should be pulling you away from anything in your mind, in your heart, in your body, that still divides you from Him. You need to have compunction.¹¹⁶

Compunction is not the same as the actual contrition which we have when we commit a sin and then we regret it, we confess it, or when we make an act of contrition, but it is habitual contrition, which means always having our sin present to our mind. We say it in the *Miserere*: "My sin is always before me" (Ps. 50:5). It does not mean having the act of the sin always before our eyes, but having that habitual state of contrition for sins committed.¹¹⁷

St. Thomas speaks of it also. He says, "Internal penance" – so we are talking about compunction – "is that whereby one grieves

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 37.

¹¹⁵ Sermon, Ecône, October 31, 1976.

¹¹⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

¹¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1981.

for a sin one has committed, and this penance should last until the end of life. Because man should always be displeased at having sinned.”¹¹⁸ We should have all our life a feeling of sorrow, of regret for having displeased God.¹¹⁹

When you pray, you can express it in this way: “My God, I regret all the sins of my past life; have pity on me, I am a sinner; I beg Your forgiveness for anything I have done to grieve You.”¹²⁰

It is very important to have this state of mind because it inspires us to put our souls back in order. We strive to put them back in order by placing ourselves in the truth. And it is precisely that humility which places us in truth, by seeking after justice, by making us seek after fortitude and the virtue of temperance.¹²¹

And that does not lower us. Do not imagine that our Lord and the Church ask us to practice these virtues in order to lower us. It is for our sanctification and to place us in the reality of the spiritual life.

If a person lived in this state of habitual compunction, he would avoid many sins because this continual regret obviously turns him away from sin. If we regret our sin, if we have a true contrition for it, we are repulsed by it and so we have this feeling, this instinct of disdain and rejection of sin.

So I think that these interior attitudes really foster our spiritual life, they really foster and allow for the exercise of charity.¹²²

The spirit of compunction makes us deplore our sins, but out of love of our Lord. As far as we possibly can, we have to be so attached to our Lord that we immediately flee temptations and occasions of sin that would threaten the slightest bit to tarnish our love for Him.¹²³

You will see that as you love our Lord more, as you live more with Him, you will become more conscious of your faults. Our Lord Himself will throw light on the things in you which dis-

¹¹⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 8.

¹¹⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 9, 1982, 9th conference.

¹²⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 5th conference.

¹²¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 22, 1977.

¹²² Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1981.

¹²³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

please Him. And you will feel it yourselves. You will have that instinct of the grace and the light of our Lord which are going to heal you, which are going to purify you.¹²⁴

And so you will come to detest your sins, your own defects. You will remain in a spirit of sorrow for your sins, but that sorrow will be inspired by the love of God, by the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will not be a sterile penance, a somber and sad penance, tightening up your heart, but on the contrary it will broaden your heart by the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²⁵

2. THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE AND OF A CRUSADE

The deep wounds of original sin can only be healed by sacrifice and renunciation. A return to order demands sacrifice. That is why it is by the cross that our Lord conquered the devil, destroyed sin and reestablished order.¹²⁶

To fight the good fight, let us have the spirit of sacrifice – I would like to say, the spirit of a crusade. The crusader is a man sacrificed. A man who goes into combat drops the *impedimenta*,¹²⁷ all those things that may hinder him in his combat. Remember the combat of David and Goliath. They tried to make David wear strong and heavy armor to protect him against the blows of Goliath. But David said, “*With that armor, I can’t do anything; I am paralyzed. Take that armor off of me. I am taking my slingshot and going into battle. With the grace of God, I will be victorious.*” (Cf. 1 Sam. 17:39, 45)

Well, that is the same state of mind we have to have in this formidable crusade. Never in all of history has there been a crusade like the one we have today. Everything is in league against the faith, everything is in league against the Church: enemies from the outside, enemies from the inside. In every area we have to fight like never before in the history of the Church.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 5th conference.

¹²⁵ Sermon, Ecône, January 7, 1973.

¹²⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 3, 1974.

¹²⁷ Whatever hinders activity and movement, especially the baggage that weighs down an army in its advance.

¹²⁸ Sermon, Ecône, March 27, 1986.

3. THE OFFERING OF ONESELF

Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange says the following, "Whenever some major and deeply entrenched evil, such as freemasonry and its effects, must be fought, whenever evil manifests itself as truly satanic, then to appease God's justice spiritual action no less profound must come forward under the immediate direction of her whom God set up as the terror of demons, Mary... Every apostle, even every fervent soul within the Church militant, should take some part in the contemplative life and its struggle, making a renewed offering of self daily at Holy Mass with increasing devotion to the consecration, the act of the Savior's eternal priesthood, and continuing the same offering throughout the course of the day in difficulties and trials and in the more and more perfect accomplishment of the duties of our state of life. When we accept supernaturally the daily trials sent to us by Providence, we should also ask God not for crosses but for the love of the crosses which He Himself has laid upon us" - from all eternity - "that we may be purified and become instruments for the salvation of our neighbor."¹²⁹

4.

TWO ASPECTS INSEPARABLE FROM THE SPIRITUAL COMBAT

You must never forget that there are always two fundamental aspects to the Christian life: the aspect of penance, of detestation of sin, of turning from sin, and the aspect of desire for God, of love for God.¹³⁰

1. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OUR DOMINANT FAULT

Sacrifices do not necessarily concern food only. They can also be aimed at our bad habits, and first our defects, our sinful

¹²⁹ *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus (L'Amour de Dieu et la Croix de Jésus*, 1929), translated by Sister Jeanne Marie, O.P., B. Herder Book Co., London, 1951, vol. 2, pp. 408-409. Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 22, 1978, 11th conference.

¹³⁰ Sermon, Ecône, January 7, 1973.

tendencies, our tendencies to sin. Think about what is often called the dominant fault, that is, the sin which we are most tempted to commit, whether it be lack of humility, lack of fraternal charity, what have you. Well, your efforts ought to be brought to bear on one defect in particular. That is how little by little we manage to correct our evil tendencies.¹³¹

Every one of us has to know himself, know what his habitual fault is and take advantage of a Lent, a retreat, an examination of conscience to acquire the virtue opposed to that vice.¹³²

But our spirituality would stay very basic if our method of examining our conscience never came to more than taking down little notes on our faults, without working to instill in our souls the love of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to understand how much these sins, these faults, these moral defects, are unpleasant to our Lord, repulsive to Him, drive Him out of our souls. That is how the penitent soul stirs itself to the battle against sin, to attach itself more to our Lord, to be closer to Him, to avoid displeasing Him.¹³³

2. CONVERSION BY CHARITY

The more we become aware of the love of God for us, the more we will have the desire to love Him. And so if we love Him a great deal, I think that, by the very fact, instinctively we will have a repulsion for sin, because sin is exactly the contrary of the love of God, it is disobedience to God, it is turning from God, it is separation from Him.¹³⁴

So we are not seeking the battle against sin just for the sake of the battle against sin. We are seeking penance in order finally to attain true charity toward God and toward our neighbor. The goal is charity, it is union with God, union with our Lord.¹³⁵

God and the Church ask us to do penance in order to make us practice charity, in order to destroy in us whatever there is of selfishness, pride; whatever there is of vice; whatever tightens around

¹³¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 1, 1977.

¹³² Easter retreat, Ecône, 1980.

¹³³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1986.

¹³⁴ Easter Retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

¹³⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 22, 1977.

our heart so to speak and closes it up inside a little ivory tower. In practicing these virtues, what we are really trying to do is expand our charity, our love for God and for our neighbor.¹³⁶

From the very first lines of the prologue to his Rule, St. Benedict, addressing the soul, presents the monastic life essentially as a return to God.¹³⁷ You know the reason why; it is because from the time of our birth sin has turned us away from God. “*You were once afar off*” (Eph. 2:13), says St. Paul. By sin, the soul is turning away from God. Therefore if we sincerely wish to seek God, we have to break with every disordered attachment to creatures and turn fully toward God. That is what St. Benedict calls a conversion to God. It is the state of every Christian. I would say the measure of our hatred of sin and our love of God may serve as the measure of our holiness, the measure of our perfection.¹³⁸

To find life, we have to die to ourselves. That is the whole spiritual life. That is our justification. And that is holiness. It really is that simple! It is basically two movements of our soul: die to sin so as to live for God. And the cross is working that in us. Very simply. The cross is the whole explanation of the spiritual life, of our interior life.

We have to hunt down sin in ourselves, which means we have to sacrifice ourselves, die to ourselves, kill off our evil tendencies, our desires to disobey God, so as to live in God. “*Having been set free from sin, you have become the servants of holiness*” (Rom. 6:18), the slaves of holiness, says St. Paul.¹³⁹

And as St. Thomas so well expresses it, the two aspects of the Christian life are contained in the same act, in the act of charity.¹⁴⁰ For if we love God, we detest anything that can put a distance between Him and us. And sin is what puts a distance. Therefore by the act of charity which we have for God and for our Lord, we have both to detest our sins and to love always more intensely

¹³⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1981.

¹³⁷ “Hearken, my son, to the precepts of thy Master, . . . that by the labour of obedience thou mayest return to [God], from whom thou didst depart by the sloth of disobedience,” *Rule of St. Benedict*, R. Washburn, London, 1875, Prologue, p. 3.

¹³⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 22, 1977.

¹³⁹ Sermon, Ecône, September 14, 1975.

¹⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 85, a. 2, ad 1.

Him who is the author of our being and the author of the grace that is in us.¹⁴¹

3. CONCLUSION: "WATCH AND PRAY"

Our Lord wants to heal us of our wounds and we can indeed attain a certain perfection, but we will have to be constantly on our guard. *Vigilate et orate*, says our Lord, "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation" (Mt. 26:41). Vigilance is one of the things our Lord insisted on strongly. Why must we watch? If we had no danger of being subject to temptation, we would not have to be watchful; we would be sure of reaching the goal; but because there are always thieves all around us, within us, always aiming at our perdition, always wanting to turn us away from the good, it means we are forced to be vigilant. Those who are not vigilant allow themselves to be dominated by all of their evil tendencies.¹⁴²

This completes the presentation of the spiritual combat. In the dispositions for combat, we have mentioned the place of charity and of interior virtues. On account of their importance, these will be studied in greater detail in the following chapter, which treats of the energies of the spiritual life.

¹⁴¹ Sermon, Ecône, January 7, 1973.

¹⁴² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 3rd conference.

III

THE ENERGIES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The energies of our spiritual life can only be supernatural. They spring from the grace received at baptism. Sanctifying grace and the indwelling of the divine Persons are their remote principles. All of the natural powers of the soul are divinely perfected by that interior suffusion, and the soul in the state of grace is rendered capable of posing virtuous acts, meritorious of eternal life.

The study of spirituality as St. Thomas Aquinas conceives of it in his *Summa Theologica* is founded on the exercise of the supernatural virtues, on the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and on the beatitudes. Those are the normal means for the exercise of our spiritual life.¹⁴³

1.

MORALS BASED ON THE VIRTUES

1. THE STUDY OF THE VIRTUES

The study of morals can be approached from the point of view of conformity to the law or else from the point of view of the full expansion of grace in the virtues, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the beatitudes, the fruits of the Holy Ghost.

¹⁴³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 30, 1976.

Catechisms in general tend to take the point of view of conformity to the law, going one by one through the commandments of God and of the Church, and they speak of charity and of the virtues as occasion arises, but only incidentally. Many books of moral theology do the same.

St. Thomas preferred a deeper study of the virtues, associating the commandments then with the virtues. The reasons for his choice are developed in Fr. Bernard's commentary at the beginning of the II^aII^{ae} of the *Summa Theologica*. His motives are rich in significance.¹⁴⁴

2. WHAT IS A VIRTUE?

A virtue is a quality which inclines the faculties (the intellect, the will and the appetites) to accomplish the good with ease and constancy.

Virtue tends toward a good. It tends toward a perfection. Fr. Bernard defines it this way: "Virtue is a manner of acting and of being which makes it so that the action is good and the man himself is good. It is a habit in the deepest sense... We do not at all mean a habit in the sense of a mechanical training or a purely animal reflex; we mean it as a purely spiritual increase, as an overabundance of being and life for the soul, as an ease added and granted to our highest faculties. The result of a habit is that one is more in possession of oneself, and better adapted to acting in accordance with nature or in accordance with grace."¹⁴⁵ Those are interesting considerations.

Virtue leads to growth. And the spiritual life is a growth of our being toward perfection. The spiritual life leads us to have more Christian virtue, more union with God, submission to His will. Our virtues grow by the grace of the sacraments, by prayer, obviously, but also by the efforts which we make to practice them better.

So we can almost observe our spiritual growth for ourselves and see our virtues increasing. As our spiritual life develops, we have the satisfaction of seeing that our faith is deepening, our

¹⁴⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 39; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁵ P.-L. Bernard, O.P., "Renseignements Techniques," in *La Foi [Faith]* (*Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}), *La Revue des Jeunes*, Paris, 1941, vol. I, pp. 308-309.

hope is gaining firmness, our charity is greater, and all of our virtues are trying to be more perfect.

“Moreover,” continues Fr. Bernard, “the virtues offer you the happiest adaptation to the object. When one possesses a habit, it means one is taken by an object, knowing it to be good, wanting it. We must bear in mind the constant preoccupation of St. Thomas, in his great wisdom, to place all of the matter of morals, that is the movement of life, under the empire and the regime of the true end and of the great objects that make up this end. Now, the virtues have the benefit of habituating us to these objects. The greatest of them all is of course God.”¹⁴⁶

Therefore the virtues truly order our lives around God. As St. Thomas says, man is ordered to God.¹⁴⁷ That ascension toward God, that ever greater union with God, obviously give satisfaction and joy to souls who feel that they are attaching themselves, by their spiritual life, to the one good, to the one truth, to the one everything, who is God. The virtues help them to ascend toward God in prayer; they help them to pass from the purgative life to the illuminative life, and finally to the unitive life. That happens through the increase of all the virtues.¹⁴⁸

3. THE VIRTUE TO AIM FOR

We have the theological virtues, which are supernatural virtues, and the cardinal virtues, which are natural virtues matched by supernatural virtues through the grace of God.¹⁴⁹

Among all these virtues, I think that you have to aim especially for the interior virtue that you are lacking the most. For example, if you are aware that you sometimes fail in charity, fail in the respect, in the deference you should have toward your neighbor, then maybe you are lacking that supernatural balance, that pacification inside your soul. That is why, in a difficulty, in a frustration, we fail to maintain ourselves in charity, whether by words we say, or by manners of acting which are not in conformity with

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹⁴⁷ *Homo ad Deum ordinatur, Summa Theologica, Ia, q. 1, a. 1.*

¹⁴⁸ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

¹⁴⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

charity. So we have to examine all that and absolutely seek those interior virtues which are fundamental.¹⁵⁰

4. A MAGNIFICENT IDEAL

The acquisition of virtues stands before the soul as a magnificent ideal to be pursued – fulfilling, enriching – a work of sanctification with the help of the Holy Spirit to attain the end sought: to accomplish, in obedience to the will of God, the work of charity toward God and toward our neighbor which is assigned to us, and so merit eternal life.

This manner of studying the moral and spiritual life, which of itself gives rise to the spiritual combat against sin, against all the wicked influences of the world and of the devil, places us in that state of vigilance so recommended by our Lord: *Orate et vigilate* (cf. Mt. 26:41), “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour*” (Mt. 25:13).

2.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

In order to live as sons of God, the Catholic receives from Him the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. These virtues unite him to God.

There are plenty of souls in the Church who strive to live honestly, to draw near to a certain ideal of moral purity; but how few know how to keep their minds elevated in the faith, upheld by hope and enflamed by charity, in order to participate fully in the life which Jesus wishes to communicate to us! Yet, we have all that is required to begin this very day an existence of sublime intimacy with God.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1981.

¹⁵¹ Easter retreat, Ecône, April 3, 1977.

1. FAITH

The sole end of the spiritual life is union with God in charity. Here below, that union rests on faith; in heaven it will rest on the beatific vision. Archbishop Lefebvre grasped very well the role of faith and charity in the spiritual life, as his episcopal motto bears witness: Credidimus caritati, "We have believed in charity." That is why he preached so often on the virtues of faith and of charity. He united the two so strongly that he saw in the Credo the song of God's love for us.

1. Faith: The foundation of holiness

Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is truly the foundation of our sanctification, of our sanctity. There is no holiness without faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Heb. 11:6).¹⁵²

The first virtue that a saint has to have is faith.¹⁵³ Faith is at the basis of any spiritual life, of all the other virtues. The faith is what our Lord asks of all those to whom He wishes to bring health or truth: *"Do you believe?"* Look at the miracle of the man born blind. At the end, our Lord asks him if he believes in the Messiah, and the blind man asks Him, *"But who is the Messiah?"* And Jesus tells him, *"He it is who speaks with thee."* Then the man says, *"I believe."* And he fell down, and he worshiped Him, the Gospel tells us (cf. Jn. 9:35-38). Our Lord always asks for faith. Faith is the fundamental virtue of our entire Christian life.¹⁵⁴

2. The Credo: The litany of God's charity

The *Credo* is the synthesis of our faith. It summarizes everything that we believe: we believe in God the Father, in God the Son who became incarnate, who took flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who suffered, was crucified, gave Himself completely for the glory of His Father. We believe in the Holy Spirit, we believe in the Catholic Church, we believe in baptism for the remission of sins, we believe in eternal life. There is everything that God has done for us, poor creatures, poor sinners. It is the sum-

¹⁵² Sermon, Ecône, March 27, 1986.

¹⁵³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 3, a. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1976.

mary of our faith: the great charity of God for us, the great love of God for us. All of that is told in the *Credo*; that is why the *Credo* has to be the basis of our faith and of our spiritual life.¹⁵⁵

So we would be wrong to recite our *Credo* mechanically, without considering the great truths which are taught to us there. It is not merely a question of past history, but the *Credo* is still happening. God is still the Creator of all things, the Holy Trinity is still living, still the source of all life, the source of all things. Moreover, everything that has been accomplished in the Church comes from the Word of God incarnate. And everything that is still being accomplished today, by the sacraments, by the Holy Mass, is the work of the Holy Spirit, third Person of the Trinity. All of that brings us back to God, makes us know Him in His intimate life, in His most Holy Trinity and in His works. So let us love to recite our *Credo*.¹⁵⁶

Each time we recite the *Credo*, each time we sing it, it ought to be a call to our love, an invitation to have an ever deeper, ever truer orientation to loving God, rendering Him thanks and doing everything so that His love for us might not be in vain.¹⁵⁷

3. *What is faith?*

1. The obedience of the intellect

The faith is none other than the submission of our intellect to the truth revealed by the authority of God.¹⁵⁸ The faith is the obedience of our intellect to our Lord Jesus Christ who reveals to us His truth. And that truth will be for us a source of life, a source of graces.¹⁵⁹

Our faith is not the result of a reasoning process, but rather it is the adherence of our intellect to revealed truths, because of God's authority. Not because of our reason, not because of arguments which we may find in our human intelligence, but because of the authority of God who reveals.¹⁶⁰ That is what the anti-

¹⁵⁵ Sermon, Lausanne, July 9, 1978; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁵⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 3rd conference.

¹⁵⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 13, 1977.

¹⁵⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 2, a. 9, ad 3.

¹⁵⁹ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1976.

¹⁶⁰ *Propter auctoritatem Dei revelantis*; cf. Pius X, *Anti-Modernist Oath*.

modernist oath says and it is the definition of our faith. God revealed it. He is God. He has all authority over our intellects and over our wills. We have to accept the word of God such as He gives it, such as it is given to us by the Church in an infallible manner.¹⁶¹

The Catholic is in an attitude of receptivity, of welcome toward what he is told: "Tell me what God revealed to us; it is so important for the salvation of my soul that I know what God has done for us." And he is given the *Credo*: "Here is the history of the charity of God for us; read the *Credo*, study all of its sentences, all of its words, and you will see, it is the history of God's love for us." Then the faithful Catholic longs to know those things and to adhere to them fully and humbly, and not just give a subjective adherence to God in general.¹⁶²

2. The object of faith

Faith makes us share the very knowledge of God. It is therefore above simple human reason, whence its obscurity, as we await the light of glory in Heaven.

St. Paul defines faith in the following manner in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "*Faith is the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1).¹⁶³

Our faith concerns realities that are obscure for us. St. Paul says that we know divine things as though in a mirror (1 Cor. 13:12). So we do not know divine realities directly.¹⁶⁴

True wisdom, for us who are Christian, consists in knowing God by means of Revelation. That knowledge is infinitely more perfect, greater, deeper than that acquired by reason alone. The study of Revelation is the object of theology,¹⁶⁵ of which philosophy is the handmaid. Theology is the absolutely perfect knowledge, since it is based on God's own understanding. By the-

¹⁶¹ Retreat for priestly ordination, Flavigny, June 24, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 26, 1976, 6th conference.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 4, a. 1; Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 5, 1974.

¹⁶⁴ Sermon, taking of the habit, Flavigny, July 5, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁵ *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 1, a. 1.

ology, we are in direct communion with the wisdom, with the knowledge of God.

The truths which are given to us come to us directly from God. They rest on the authority of God. Thus, God infuses knowledge in us in a way, a little as He does it for the angels, and we discover the wonders of the Trinity, of Creation, of the Incarnation, of the Redemption. It is therefore in this spiritual world, in this supernatural world, that we ought to live. It is not an imaginary world; it is not a made-up world.¹⁶⁶

Open your theology books; you will find Scripture and Tradition, which are the two sources of Revelation, and they will show you, in the chapter on Tradition, the *norma fidei*, the norm of the faith. So it is not we who decide what we have to believe, but we look for what the Church tells us. She tells us first of all through the professions of faith, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, then through the dogmatic councils, and finally through everything that has been solemnly and infallibly taught by the magisterium of the Church. That is the unity we have to cling to. The pope, bishops, priests have the authority for keeping the faith. It is the primary purpose of their authority: to profess the faith and to spread it abroad in the hearts of men.¹⁶⁷

Let us add that faith is not made to last forever. Our faith is a step. We have to reflect on that often. This virtue of faith will not eternally remain. Faith is going to disappear before the vision of God. When we see God, faith will end. We will no longer need to believe, we will no longer need testimony, we will be face to face with the reality.¹⁶⁸

As for those who do not live in the world of Revelation, of faith, in this world which the *Credo* and theology describe for us, their life is illusion; they live in error. It is horrible to think that a person can spend his whole life in error, in the most total illusion, in ignorance of the most important things there are to be known.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 18, 1977.

¹⁶⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 22, 1976.

¹⁶⁸ Sermon, taking of the habit, Flavigny, July 5, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 18, 1977.

3. The certitude of faith

By the virtue of faith, we come to know the truth in a manner that is more certain than by reason, because that word of truth comes to us directly from God Himself, from the Word of God.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, there can be no doubt of it.

In contrast, there can be a great deal of difficulty in attaining the truths knowable by reason. It takes time for an inquiry into the truth. To have a full picture of the truths accessible by reason, we have to use the knowledge of those who have gone before us. On that path to learning truths of the natural order in an ever more perfect way, there are always hypotheses, there are always disagreements, among even philosophers themselves.

But by faith, truths are clear. They are revealed by God, contained in the Gospel and in Tradition, and taught by the magisterium.¹⁷¹

4. Advice for increasing our faith

We who live in a time when faith is vanishing, let us give our faith a new energy, a profound vigor, firmly grounded in unchanging principles, so that we might communicate that fidelity to all those around us.¹⁷²

1. See things as Jesus Christ sees them

Our Lord is the truth. He said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life*" (Jn. 14:6). "*I am the truth.*" So it is by looking upon our Lord and asking ourselves who He is that we are going to increase our faith.

Our Lord is first and foremost a witness. St. John repeats it again and again. Our Lord is the witness of the Father. "*Amen, amen, I say to thee,*" our Lord affirms to Nicodemus, "*We speak of what We know, and We bear witness to what We have seen; and Our witness you do not receive.*" (Jn. 3:11) But I see that to which I bear witness. You do not see it. You do not see Heaven, you do not see the Trinity, you do not see the angels, you do not see the spirits. I see them, I am the witness of Heaven, I am the witness of My Fa-

¹⁷⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 4, a. 8.

¹⁷¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 13, 1975.

¹⁷² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 1st conference.

ther – *but you do not believe this testimony that I give you.*” He reproaches Nicodemus for the same lack of faith as all those other men who heard our Lord speak. Our Lord is an eye witness. What we need to aim for is to see the truth with the understanding our Lord had; that is to say, to try to conceive in our own minds what our Lord was seeing, and so place all the truths of the faith one by one before our eyes and consider them the way our Lord Jesus Christ Himself saw them.¹⁷³

2. Imitate the faith of the saints

It is difficult for us to put ourselves in the atmosphere that truly fosters the development of our faith: the presence of our Lord, the reality of the Redemption, which is applied to us by Him, our Lord present in the Holy Eucharist, the solicitude of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and of St. Joseph for us, the presence of our holy guardian angels, the reality of Heaven, of purgatory, of hell, of the evil spirits who are in the world and who have a real influence, and not an imaginary one, even now.¹⁷⁴

And yet, when we read the lives of the saints, the lives of people who have had particular graces as regards the faith – especially those who were privileged to have before them something of Heaven, something of that vision – it seems to me that we understand better the greatness, the beauty, the wealth, the sublimity of our faith. Our faith is a life. It is not a simple belief, a simple tale, a story they tell us. No: it is a life!

Our faith is living. “*The just man lives by faith*” (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). Why? Because that faith puts us in contact with God. Faith allows truly the most intimate contact we can have with God.¹⁷⁵

The saints were able to know the most Holy Trinity to a certain extent. Oh, certainly, to a very small extent. For if God had revealed to them what He is, His Holy Trinity, they would not have been able to remain on earth, they would have died, died of the contemplation of the most Holy Trinity: we cannot be in a mortal body like our own and have the vision of the most Holy Trinity.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 13, 1975.

¹⁷⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 5, 1974.

¹⁷⁵ Sermon, taking of the habit, Flavigny, July 5, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 28.

¹⁷⁶ Sermon, taking of the habit, Ecône, June 5, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 29.

The most Blessed Virgin Mary with her faith considered things in their spiritual, supernatural reality. She did not see the things revealed to her by our Lord, but she considered them truly as existing and her life was all penetrated with these realities. That is what faith is.¹⁷⁷

You therefore need to increase your faith. Say to our Lord, like the Apostles, "*Lord, we believe, but 'increase our faith'*" (Lk. 17:5).¹⁷⁸

5. *Gratitude for the faith*

What gratitude we need to express to God, for having given us faith in His charity, faith in His love, faith in His Incarnation, in His Redemption, in His Resurrection, in His glory! Why have we been chosen, we in particular, predestined by God to have this faith?¹⁷⁹ It is a great mystery. So many souls never had the faith! Many never even knew our Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps never heard Him spoken of, in the vast expanses of China, of India, or I don't know where - though it does seem that the Name of Jesus really has reached to the ends of the earth. But many did not believe, did not understand. And then, even among Christians, how many were baptized but since have lost the faith! They no longer believe in the love of God for them. What a great sorrow! So let us strive as far as possible to live these great realities.¹⁸⁰

6. *The crisis of the faith*

1. A virtue under fire

The government of the Church was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ in order to spread the faith, to carry it everywhere, to defend it. We have only to list out the different dicasteries instituted at the Vatican and we see that the role of the Church's government is to propagate the faith, in continuance of the Church's Apostolicity. The different ministries of the supreme pontiff: the Congregation of Bishops, the Congregation of the Clergy and then of Propaganda - propagation of the faith - and the Holy Office, the Office of the Inquisition for the defense of the faith... every-

¹⁷⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 5, 1974.

¹⁷⁸ Sermon, Ecône, December 24, 1977.

¹⁷⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 6, a. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1987.

thing is oriented around the extension of the faith, around the spreading and the defending of the faith.

Unfortunately, if there is one value in the world today which is being called into question and attacked, it is faith. We perceive with sorrow that those who are responsible for spreading the faith and defending it are instead working with all their might to destroy it. We simply cannot deny the reality. It is not without motive that the Roman Congregations, like that of the Propagation of the Faith and that of the Holy Office, have been more or less reduced to nothing by other organizations that have taken their place.

It was with intent that they brought organizations into the Church's administration that no longer profess the Catholic faith. It is a great misfortune for the Church. And we simply cannot deny that the situation in which Rome finds herself has repercussions throughout the entire world. There are now bishops and priests, many priests, who no longer have the Catholic faith.

There are countless examples. We receive news every day that is more and more stupefying, particularly as regards ecumenism.

So we refer ourselves to the letters of St. Paul in his two Epistles to the Corinthians, in which he leaves no room for misinterpretation: we must not have contact with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), we have to separate ourselves from unbelievers because there is only "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (Eph. 4:5).

In his Epistles, we see with what force, with what energy, with what commanding authority St. Paul insists with the Corinthians to tell them, "*Do not mix with the unbelievers*" (2 Cor. 6:14-16). It is not about being in a more complete communion or in a less complete communion – there is no such thing. There is faith and there is infidelity. There is an abyss between the two. And those who do not have the faith adore idols, because if they no longer truly have our Lord Jesus Christ for God, they no longer have the Father either. He who has not the Son, says St. John, has not the Father (1 John 2:23). And we have only one God and one Lord, by whom we were created and for whom we were created, says St. Paul (Col. 1:16).¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Sermon, Ecône, March 27, 1986.

2. The faith of the liberals

The error of liberalism is a lack of faith in practice, a lack of faith in the social kingship of our Lord. Liberals want to limit His social kingship. Ultimately they make a liar of our Lord, who tells us to recite every day in the *Pater*: “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*” (Mt. 6:10). They do not want the will of God to be done on earth as in Heaven. So they limit its field of action. They tell us, “You are not being fair because first you ask for freedom of religion – in communist countries for example – and then you turn around and reject it.” We answer them by saying that error must always be rejected anywhere it is found. And therefore we have to do everything possible so that our Lord might triumph. We are not out for our own personal benefit. It is a question of the truth, a question of the glory of God, of Him who will come to judge all men, the Moslems just as much as the others. What we want is that our Lord reign finally over us all.¹⁸²

The liberal lacks faith, or he has a false faith, a sentimental faith. He situates faith on the level of feelings, whereas faith is an adherence of the intellect and the will to God who reveals, therefore to something which imposes itself upon us from the outside. For the liberal, faith is a religious sentiment, a feeling. This religious sentiment is entirely subjective, so it depends on each individual. It turns faith inside out. The liberal constantly criticizes what the Church teaches. So he cannot truly sanctify himself. That is why his charity is false, because he is condescending toward error, whereas charity would be precisely to communicate that faith to others, that absolutely tremendous revelation of God making Himself known to us through our Lord, through the Church, announcing to us all the riches, the eternal life which He wills to give us.¹⁸³

7. *Beautiful examples of defenders of the faith*

Pope St. Pius X himself was raised to the altars because of his faith. The prayer of the Mass of his feastday says so explicitly: “O God, who have filled St. Pius X, supreme pontiff, with strength and wisdom, in order to defend the faith...” Indeed, if there is a pope in modern times who truly defended the Catholic faith

¹⁸² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1976.

¹⁸³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 1, 1974.

against the errors of the day, it is definitely St. Pius X. What a model for us!

St. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews praises all those who in the Old Testament manifested their faith. He lists those who fought because of their faith, who had to take refuge in the mountains, in the caves, who were persecuted, who were martyred because of their faith.

And he concludes, "*Therefore let us also... run with patience to the fight set before us; looking towards the author and finisher of faith, Jesus, who... sits at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Heb. 12:1-2). It is as though St. Paul could still hear St. Stephen crying out, "*I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God*" (Acts 7:56). The *Acts of the Apostles* says that he was present and approved of the martyrdom of St. Stephen. He is the one who watched over the garments of those who were stoning him. Remembering this vision of St. Stephen, St. Paul reminds us that Jesus, "*finisher of the faith,*" is seated at the right hand of God.¹⁸⁴

St. Paul goes on, "*My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord*" (Heb. 12:5). And he concludes, "*This faith will make you participate in God's immutability. By it, render Him a worship which is pleasing to Him*" (cf. Heb. 12:28).

That ought to be your own plan of action. Yes, by faith we have a share in God's immutability and participate in it already. St. Paul says it, all that changes will disappear and give way before that which is immutable, that which is eternal (Heb. 1:10-12). And so, already here below, even before those ephemeral things have disappeared, we participate already by our faith in the immutability of God because we are united to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is immutable. That realization ought to be so consoling for us, ought to strengthen us in our conviction that the faith, which has been passed on to us through twenty centuries of the Church, is indeed always the same; and that we must not change it. Jesus Christ yesterday, today and for ever, is always the same.¹⁸⁵

8. *The spirit of faith*

If there is one virtue we need today in a particular way, that virtue is fidelity. Fidelity comes from the word *fides*, which means

¹⁸⁴ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 58, a. 2 and 3.

¹⁸⁵ Sermon, Ecône, October 11, 1981.

faith. But *fidelity* says more than *faith*; it is perseverance in the faith, it is perseverance in the spirit of faith. It is the practice of the faith, not only for a day, for a month, but our whole life long. Fidelity means being attached to the promises we have made, to the commitment we have made. That fidelity, in its fullness, in its perfection, in its infinity, is first a fidelity to God Himself.¹⁸⁶

Renew the spirit of faith in yourselves. Have a profound faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, because the object of our faith is actually Him.

If anyone here below every had a profound faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, it was certainly the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. So ask Mary and Joseph to communicate to you their faith so that you may never have any hesitation, never any doubt as to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other God than our Lord Jesus Christ, united to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. We repeat it at the end of all of our prayers: "in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end."

So we have to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and not allow there to be any place in our mind, in our heart, in our soul, for anybody but Him. All honor and all glory we have to render to Him.¹⁸⁷

9. *Let us be strong in the faith!*

Let us follow our Lord Jesus Christ in the footsteps of those who showed us the path of the faith. That path involves a combat. We will be persecuted to the degree that we maintain the faith. This rationalistic, modernist world cannot endure the faith. So, in the measure that we express the faith on the outside, be it by our clothing, by our attitude, we will be persecuted. It is to be expected.

All those who have professed the faith have been persecuted. The Virgin Mary herself is called the Queen of Martyrs. She, too, on account of her faith, suffered a martyrdom, in front of our Lord Jesus Christ, right next to the cross.

So we have to expect that we will be persecuted, but let us not flag in our faith, let us not be weak. Let us be firm, like all those

¹⁸⁶ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1975.

¹⁸⁷ Sermon, Ecône, December 24, 1977.

who have given us an example and who have gone before us, whether in the Old or the New Testament.¹⁸⁸

The action that you personally carry out, each one of you in your family, by your attitude as true Christians, as true Catholics, by keeping that faith that was taught to you in your childhood by true priests, by holy bishops, will bear fruit, and it bears fruit already. Our kind mother in Heaven has conquered all heresies, all errors. So she will not fail to vanquish the modern errors that have penetrated even within the Church, and she will give the victory to her divine Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁹

2. HOPE

Hope is no less necessary than faith for reaching salvation and perfection. Its object is essentially salvation, not in this world but in the next. By hope, our will takes already as its goal receiving and obtaining the divine good, that is, eternal beatitude in Heaven. Hope leads the faithful Catholic to await divine help to accomplish his salvation.¹⁹⁰ That is the object of its confident prayer.

1. The importance of hope

We are made above all to live with God, to live as children of God.

It little matters whether we live in poverty or wealth here below; what counts is the love we have for God. How will we have spent the few years which God has given us, with respect to Himself, with respect to the realities of Heaven? How will we have passed on to our children this hope of Heaven, these eternal realities? That is what God is going to ask us on the day we stand before Him.¹⁹¹

If we suffer, if we weep, if we are persecuted, if we are in anguish, in difficulties, it is the hope of Heaven that holds us, the hope of belonging totally to God, being totally with God for eternity.¹⁹² That hope should sustain us. That is what the *Catechism of*

¹⁸⁸ Sermon, Ecône, October 11, 1981.

¹⁸⁹ Sermon, Ecône, July 25, 1982.

¹⁹⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 17, a. 7.

¹⁹¹ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1975.

¹⁹² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 17, a. 2.

the Council of Trent says, "In his instructions to the faithful the pastor, therefore, should unceasingly endeavor to light up in their souls an ardent desire of the promised rewards of eternal life, so that whatever difficult duties he may inculcate as a part of the Christian's life, the faithful may look upon as light, or even agreeable, and may yield a more willing and cheerful obedience to God."¹⁹³

2. *The vanishing of this virtue*

The virtue of hope is vanishing today because modern man has a tendency to place all of his hope here below. Right now the great themes of preaching are centered around social progress, social justice, material progress, the distribution of the goods of this world, but that is not what we were made for.¹⁹⁴

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 not think about God anymore or about spiritual goods or about eternal life. And what does hope mean if not to fasten our gaze on goods that are eternal?¹⁹⁵

3. *The virtue of the pilgrim*

The virtue of hope is truly the virtue of the pilgrim. It is the virtue of one who is on the road, of one who is thinking of the goal toward which he is heading. It ought to be natural to think of it. Indeed, when someone travels somewhere, his only idea during the trip there is to reach the goal he has set for himself. It's obvious. What would you think of the traveler whom you asked, "Where are you going?" and he answered, "I don't know, I haven't thought about it." If you ask someone where he is heading, it goes without saying that he will answer, "I am going to see such and such a thing; I am going to meet such and such a person..." He is continually thinking about the goal he has set for himself. So it is a

¹⁹³ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 132. Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

¹⁹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1975.

¹⁹⁵ Sermon, February 2, 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 78-79.

little surprising to see that people do not think about, that people do not reflect on, that people do not meditate sufficiently on the goal to which they are heading. It would be so natural to think of it constantly, because we are always on the road. We are *in via*, we are *viators*, voyagers.¹⁹⁶

Let us always bear in mind the word of Scripture which tells us that “*here we have no permanent city, but we seek for the city that is to come*” (Heb. 13:14). How many illusions in this regard! If we could, with the knowledge of God, know what goes on in the minds, in the hearts of the men who dwell on earth today! How many of them are preoccupied with that future dwelling which is meant to be theirs? All men are invited to live one day in that eternal dwelling. What are they thinking? What was in the thoughts of all the generations gone by before us? So we really are right to believe that our dwelling here on earth is ephemeral, fleeting.¹⁹⁷

4. *On the road to the homeland*

Life here below is a passage: a few years, a few days for certain children. I am telling you this to make you realize that we are not made to stay here below. We know how long we have spent on this earth, but we do not know how much time we have yet to spend here. So we have to think of the family that we are going to go join. They are waiting for us. God is waiting for us, our parents are waiting for us, the elect of Heaven are waiting for us.¹⁹⁸

Hope makes us desire to be united with our Lord Jesus Christ for eternity. It makes us desire to enter the glory of the Holy Trinity through our Lord Jesus Christ, in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is no small thing. If we lived more fully in hope, we would not fear death. Many fear death, are terrified at the thought of death, whereas on the contrary it is a deliverance and our souls are going toward that for which they were created, toward their eternal happiness. If we have hope, death does not frighten us. On the contrary, we desire it as St. Paul did; he said, “*I am desiring to depart and be with Christ*” (Phil. 1:23).¹⁹⁹ How many souls have desired

¹⁹⁶ Conference to future deacons, Ecône, June 1, 1990.

¹⁹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1977.

¹⁹⁸ Retreat, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 24, 1984, 8th conference.

¹⁹⁹ *Desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo*.

that moment, to go to be with God, to join our Lord in eternity! We have to live by that hope.²⁰⁰

Hundreds of thousands of souls leave this earth every day, to go where? Toward whom is life leading us? Toward God, toward Paradise, toward Heaven. You are the ones who have to teach them hope in the word of God, but also a certain fear and trembling for the salvation of their soul. There is how you are going to make souls avoid sin, which moves them in the opposite direction of that essential goal.²⁰¹

So that's why we have to make firm resolutions to avoid all sin, in order to keep supernatural life, the life of grace, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in our souls, and to reach the port of salvation filled with that grace and certain that one day our bodies are going to rise again at the touch of our risen souls. That is the great mystery of the Christian life.²⁰²

5. *The Eucharist: Pledge of hope*

The Eucharist is the mystery of our hope. It is our Lord Himself who said it, "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day*" (Jn. 6:55). He will be our resurrection. The body of our Lord Jesus Christ present in our poor bodies is a pledge of our resurrection. It is already everlasting life inside of us; and that everlasting life will never leave us. Even at the hour of our death, because we have received Communion, because we have been united to our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, there will be in our souls that seed of the resurrection of our bodies for eternity. It is our Lord Himself who says it, and that's actually the Gospel chosen by the Church for the daily Mass of the dead.²⁰³

The Eucharist is like a seed in us, a seed of the resurrection of our bodies, since we receive at Communion our Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead. He is in us with His risen body, His glorious body. So he is for us a kind of seed of the resurrection. All of these reminders are so beautiful, so consoling, that we will never be able to thank God sufficiently for being able to come to Holy

²⁰⁰ Sermon, Ecône, May 22, 1988.

²⁰¹ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1983, *Priestly Holiness*, p. 301.

²⁰² Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 44.

²⁰³ Sermon, Ecône, June 17, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 140.

Communion every single day.²⁰⁴

6. *Our eyes turned toward Heaven*

St. Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained the goal, or already have been made perfect, but I press on hoping that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it already. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind, that is, my sin, I strain forward to what is before, I press on towards the goal, to the prize of God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus. Let us then, who wish to seek perfection, be of this mind.” (Cf. Phil. 3:12-15) If we wish to be straining forward after perfection, we have to be seeking the knowledge of our Lord and practicing His virtues, casting behind ourselves all that hinders us from reaching Him.²⁰⁵

Jesus said, “I am the door” (Jn. 10:9). A person is not going to come into the sheepfold through the window or through the roof; he is going to come in through the door.²⁰⁶ Mercenaries are the ones who come in through the window. Through the roof come panthers wanting to kill the flock. But the sheep enter by the door. And Jesus said, “I am the door.” What can that mean except that there is no other way. If we want to reach eternal life, we have to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus Christ. He is the one who has to be constantly the object of our thoughts, the object of our gaze, the object of our love, the object of all our concerns. Am I with our Lord? Do I live with our Lord? Is our Lord truly my model, my guide? Am I His disciple? Am I doing His will?²⁰⁷

Freedom means freeing ourselves from the things of the world and attaching ourselves to eternal goods. You sing in the evening at Compline, “*You have established us in hope*” (Ps. 4:10).²⁰⁸ Yes, truly, God has given us a soul in need of eternal goods. So in our pilgrimage here below we have to keep our eyes always turned toward Heaven.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Easter retreat, Ecône, April 6, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 141.

²⁰⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 5th conference.

²⁰⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 8, a. 6, ad 3.

²⁰⁷ Conference for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, March 3, 1988.

²⁰⁸ Psalm of compline for Sundays.

²⁰⁹ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1974.

And we hope soon to reach that beatific vision, the vision of God. Privileged souls who had special graces became strangers to all the things of earth. Remember Bernadette: at those moments when she was seeing the Blessed Virgin, people used to put a candle flame under her fingers to see whether or not she had any kind of sensation. She didn't feel a thing! It was as though she had left her body behind, she was so completely subjugated by what she was seeing. We are all destined to have, not only that little vision of Heaven that Bernadette had, but truly Heaven itself, God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ in His splendor and in His glory.²¹⁰

Our guardian angel sees Heaven. As our Lord said, we must not scandalize these children because "*their angels in Heaven always behold the face of My Father in Heaven*" (Mt. 18:10). So our guardian angel is seeing God right now. He does not hope in Him, he sees Him. Let us ask him therefore to help us to think of Heaven and to live more fully in that virtue of hope.²¹¹

3. CHARITY

Charity is a virtue by which we love God for Himself and above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Of no other virtue did Archbishop Lefebvre speak so abundantly. We have therefore been obliged to make a selection among his different comments. The aspects we have retained will be enough to show the beauty of charity and to emphasize the place it is meant to occupy in the spiritual life.

1. *The virtue par excellence*

If you are trying to pinpoint what perfection is ultimately, take especially the books of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, who is going to tell you that perfection is ultimately charity.²¹²

Charity is truly what is most divine, but we have to have the right understanding. Charity cannot mean a kind of sentimentality.

²¹⁰ Sermon, taking of the habit, July 5, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 28-29.

²¹¹ Conference to future deacons, Ecône, June 1, 1990.

²¹² "Christian perfection consists especially in charity," Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, translation by Sr. Timothea Doyle, TAN Books, Rockford, Ill., 2010, p. 129. Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

God knows if people talk about love today, but that love is being degraded.²¹³

1. Charity in the divine plan

Charity is the key to the mystery of God – if there is a key to that mystery – and at the same time the key to the mystery of our own life. Because we are made in the image of God, we can have no other tendencies, no other desires except to love. We are born with this desire to love God and love our neighbor.²¹⁴

If God is charity, what else can He do but spread the charity that is in Him: spread His charity not only within the Trinity Itself, in the operations *ad intra*, but also in the operations *ad extra*, which are Creation, the Incarnation, the Redemption? All those things can only be the expression of His charity.²¹⁵

Charity is to be found even in those creatures which are not spiritual. Those creatures cannot be defined by charity properly speaking, but rather by an image of charity.

Animals are ordered to their end by their instincts. You see the birds which reproduce and go out to find food for their young. You see the roots of the tree with the sap that flows, that climbs, that spreads to the branches and to the leaves, the flowers that give fruit, the fruit that falls to the ground and germinates. It is like an image of charity. Even take the laws of purely material beings, like the law of gravity for example. The attraction of gravity is like a calling toward, which again forms a kind of image of charity. Every creature has an end, every creature has laws, which are like an expression of the law of charity.

Obviously there can be no comparison between that image of charity and spiritual charity which is a conscious, fully-willed movement toward, a movement of love and union with God and with others.

So we can truly find some trace of the definition of God in absolutely every creature.

Now, if these beings reach their happiness or their perfection in following the law of their instinct, we, men, to whom God has

²¹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1978; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 250.

given the knowledge of His law of charity, ought to find our happiness in the conscious application of that law which is in us: a law of charity which is in God, a law of charity which is in all spirits.²¹⁶

It is impossible that spiritual creatures, who are created in His image, not have been created in the intention that they, too, become charity.

So if we want to be closer to the Holy Trinity and resemble It, we will do so in the measure that we, too, are charity. It's obvious, it's simple, and it gives meaning to everything. That is why our essential, fundamental law is charity. God has inscribed it in our nature. Our Lord said it, that all of the commandments come down to these two: love God, love our neighbor (*Mt. 22:37-40*). In the measure that we accomplish this law of charity within us, we will resemble the Holy Trinity, who is Charity.²¹⁷

God willed to give us freedom in the application of that law of charity so that we might acquire merit, but unfortunately that very awareness of our law means that we are capable of opposing it. When we think of the fact that all material beings, all vegetation, all of the animals follow the law of charity impeccably, with no hesitation whatsoever, by their instinct, by the laws of nature, and so realize the end for which they were created, would we then stand out in all creation as refusing that law of charity?

We have to understand that our spiritual nature allows us to know the law, but only that we might apply it. God has given us the capacity to know the law, but certainly not so we would stand up against it! On the contrary, our awareness is there so that we might earn the recompense, which is the glory of Heaven.

God did not say, "Do whatever you want." He said, "Your law is to love God and your neighbor. That is your law, which contains in itself all of the precepts. I created you to follow that law of charity which is in you." God asks us to put that law into practice so that we might find our happiness in it, as animals find their happiness in the application of their law and of their instinct.

Think of the clockmaker who calls into play a series of laws in making his clock. Well, we might say the clock is happy, so to

²¹⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

²¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1978.

speak, when all of the gears are functioning and it is keeping time. If the clock were suddenly to say, "No, I don't agree. I refuse to have my gears turn that way..." then it would simply not function.

That is what often happens with us. God gives us an extraordinary clock and we say, "No, no, I don't agree, I refuse to function that way." We go against the law of charity which God conceived for us.²¹⁸

We must not imagine Christian spirituality as a series of categorical imperatives, having no other reason for being except as positive laws willed by the Church; having no other explanation than just the fact of being commanded. God does not act by caprice or change His mind based on His mood. From all eternity, everything is foreseen and everything comes from Him with utter charity, which is free, of course, but unchangeable. Once given the nature of our will and the nature of the charity that resides in the will, as God ordained, then all spirituality is a logical consequence, and it becomes easy to understand that there is in fact only one manner of being, only one attitude of the soul toward God, and that is charity.²¹⁹

It is our Lord Himself who said it, all the Law and the Prophets are contained in the two commandments of love: "*Thou shalt love God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself*" (cf. Mt. 22:37-40). That is the law which is given to us. Why did God create us? So that we might know Him, and that we might be charity toward Him and toward our neighbor. All of the commandments come back to that, so much so that all of our actions, from our childhood until our death, could, if we wished, and should be acts of charity.²²⁰

2. The accomplishment of the divine plan

By the very fact that we are created by God, that we come out from the hands of God, so to speak, it means we come from God's love, from God's charity. The mission of our Lord also comes from the love of God, desiring to save the world. St. John says it as he

²¹⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

²¹⁹ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²²⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 9th conference.

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)²²¹

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 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.²²²

Charity surpasses anything our will can do by its nature alone. St. Thomas says that the will has to be moved by the Holy Spirit to produce that act of love which is charity.²²³

When that dynamism of charity inside of us is oriented toward its true end, then it is the breath of the Holy Spirit. Then all of our corporal and spiritual faculties reach their fulfillment under the divine influence of the law and of grace. The various faculties acquire *habitus* that we call virtues. Men become virtuous, in the image of our Lord and of the Virgin Mary. Men become holy and imbue all of their thoughts and their actions with the spirit of faith and with charity.²²⁴

²²¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 14, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 250.

²²² Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 250-251.

²²³ *Summa Theologica*, II^oII^{ae}, q. 23, a. 2. Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²²⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 38-39; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 23-24.

2. *The demands of charity*

1. A total gift

Charity has a thirsting to vanish in the one beloved, who is God. “*I am desiring to be loosed from the bonds of the body and to be with Christ*” (cf. Phil. 1:23). “*The charity of Christ impels me*” (2 Cor. 5:14). Why? Because in the last analysis, charity means the gift of self in view of union with the object loved.

That gift of self is not in the intellect but in the will. So ultimately it is the gift of our will and leads to an identification of wills.

When that union of wills is a union with God, it is obvious that God as the Supreme Being is going to be the one absorbing our will, in a certain way.²²⁵

St. Thomas says that the essence of charity is “in man’s loving God above all things, and subjecting himself to Him entirely, by referring all that is his to God,” *omnia sua referendo in ipsum*.²²⁶ To refer all things to God – there is the foundation of the spiritual life. Sin is loving a creature without referring it to God. Referring all things to God – there you go, spiritual life simplified. We would be saints if we were in that charity always.²²⁷

If we want to be charity, then we cannot keep anything for ourselves. Charity has no measure, just as faith and hope have no measure. When we start talking about measuring out charity, it means we are holding something back. It is like wanting to hold back a flood, put a limit on a flood, whose very nature is to give itself entirely. A person who is selfish and is holding something back is imposing a boundary on charity.

Charity is demanding. When St. Augustine says, “love and do what you will,” it is understood by the term *love* that we do only the will of the one we love.²²⁸

The word *love* contains in itself all of Christian perfection, because it implies all of the virtues and so complete conformity to

²²⁵ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²²⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 24, a. 12.

²²⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 26, 1981.

²²⁸ *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. John*, treatise 7, §8. Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

the will of God, the disappearance of self-will. "Do what you will" means that a soul at that level of perfection cannot help but desire the will of God in all things, and so the soul does indeed do what it wills. The case is not the same with beginners in the way of Christian perfection.

By charity, our will unites itself, that is to say conforms itself to the will of God. That conformity is the essential demand of charity because it is the essential demand of friendship. "The proper of friends consists in having a same will and a same object of joy and of sorrow."²²⁹

Our union is going to be perfect once our will is entirely in unison with the will of God. We shall be one with God because in all things and everywhere, out of love, we conform our will to His.

"He who keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. And in this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." (1 John 3:24)

My very dear friends, a person who spends his whole life without desiring, without aspiring toward that union with God through the conformity of his will to God's, in the image of Christ, will have understood nothing of the Christian life.²³⁰

2. Self-denial

In order to resemble God and live out our vocation as Christians, we have to become charity. And because we are selfish and because charity is the opposite of selfishness, we have to learn to become charitable – in other words, to become sons of God.

Selfishness makes us center everything on ourselves; charity centers everything on God.

Charity and the self cannot coexist, in the sense that living for self, bringing everything back to self, is not compatible with bringing everything back to God.

To desire God's good is to desire His will, His desires, because He can only desire the good. We therefore have to drown our will in God's will, which is going to mean abnegation, self-

²²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, 9 *Ethicorum*, quoted by Henri-Dominique Noble, O.P., in "Renseignements techniques," *La Charité II (Summa Theologica)*, *La Revue des Jeunes*, Paris, 1950, p. 367.

²³⁰ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

denial. We are sinners, and so without denying ourselves it is going to be impossible for us to sanctify ourselves in charity.²³¹

3. *The stages of an increase in charity*

St. Thomas wonders how we make our charity increase and how we can differentiate between the various degrees of charity. He gives an admirable summary of the stages we have to pass through: "The spiritual increase of charity may be considered in respect of a certain likeness to the growth of the human body. For although this latter growth may be divided into many parts, yet it has certain fixed divisions according to those particular actions or pursuits to which man is brought by this same growth. Thus we speak of a man being an infant until he has the use of reason, after which we distinguish another state of man wherein he begins to speak and to use his reason, while there is again a third state, that of puberty, when he begins to acquire the power of generation, and so on until he arrives at perfection.

"In like manner the divers degrees of charity are distinguished according to the different predominant pursuits to which man is brought by the increase of charity."²³²

Then St. Thomas describes the three degrees, the three stages, as it were, of the spiritual life: the purgative life, the illuminative life and the unitive life.

"For at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity: this concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed or fostered lest it be destroyed: in the second place man's chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose chief aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it: while a man's third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ. In like manner we observe in local motion that at first there is withdrawal from one term, then approach to the other term, and thirdly, rest in this term."²³³

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 24, a. 9.

²³³ *Ibid.*

We have to try to meditate on this progression of our charity. What stage are we at? Are we still beginners? Are we intermediate? Are we among the perfect? We have to ask ourselves what efforts we need to make to unite ourselves always more closely to God.²³⁴

4. *Love of self*

St. Thomas distinguishes two parts in man. "There are two things in man, his spiritual nature and his corporeal nature."²³⁵ There are two lives in us: the exterior or sensitive life and the life of the soul, the interior life. And St. Thomas concludes that we have an obligation to love ourselves, but to love ourselves for our spiritual good, for the good of our soul, which is the most important part. It is normal that we have a great desire for our soul to progress in charity. So there is a right and a necessary love of self. That is the love of self to which Our Lord is alluding when He says that we have to love our neighbor as ourself (*Mt. 22:39*).

With due proportion, we also need to love our body, but as an instrument designed to help us obtain eternal beatitude.²³⁶

St. Thomas continues, "Our bodies can be considered in two ways, first, in respect of their nature, secondly, in respect of the corruption of sin and its punishment. Now the nature of our body was created, not by an evil principle, as the Manicheans pretend, but by God. Hence we can use it for God's service, according to *Romans 6:13*: '*Present... your members as instruments of justice unto God.*'²³⁷ Consequently, out of the love of charity with which we love God, we ought to love our bodies also; but we ought not to love the evil effects of sin and the corruption of punishment."²³⁸ We need to root out the corruption of our fallen nature through the influence of charity. It is the same with the disordered tendencies of our soul. It is in this sense that our Lord asks us to lose our soul in order to save it (*Lk. 17:33*). To lose our soul means to lose whatever is evil in our soul.

²³⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 6, 1981.

²³⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 26, a. 4.

²³⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 25, a. 5, *ad 2*.

²³⁷ *Exhibete membra vestra arma justitiæ Deo*.

²³⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 25, a. 5.

What is primary in man is his rational soul. What is secondary is his sensitive and corporeal nature.²³⁹ Once he has laid down these principles, St. Thomas asks himself, "Do sinners love themselves?" And he answers, "No, sinners do not love themselves."

"The good look upon their rational nature or the inward man as being the chief thing in them, wherefore in this way they think themselves to be what they are. On the other hand, the wicked reckon their sensitive and corporeal nature, or the outward man, to hold the first place... Wherefore, since they know not themselves aright, they do not love themselves aright, but love what they think themselves to be."²⁴⁰ They are under an illusion. They imagine that the only thing worth pursuing is the good of their bodies, the good of the senses, material goods. That is all they seek. And so they do not really love themselves.

"But the good know themselves truly, and therefore truly love themselves." St. Thomas says of the virtuous, "The good love themselves, as to the inward man, because they wish the preservation thereof in its integrity."²⁴¹

5. *The love of neighbor*

1. A supernatural love

To know how we should love our neighbor supernaturally, we simply have to look at how God loves him, the goal which God has in loving him. Thus St. Thomas says that we should love men "for what they have of God."²⁴² Consequently, we love God in our neighbor.

Fraternal charity, a theological virtue, has something universal about it because its motive is universal. We love in all men that universal value that they have of being called to the friendship of God: "that they may be in God."²⁴³

We need to discover the image of God in every human face, attach ourselves to what is eternal and divine in every man, even those whom we otherwise would not care about or would not care

²³⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 25, a. 7.

²⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 25, a. 7.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 7, 1981.

²⁴² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 25, a. 1, *ad* 1.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, c.

for. Only the fervent love of God, a love coming from Heaven, is capable of inspiring this supernatural sentiment and this universal devotion.

What a far cry from that purely natural sentiment, that purely natural virtue, that purely natural friendship, which makes us love our neighbor for the qualities that we find in him, either because they correspond to our temperament and our taste, or because, by a certain roundabout selfishness, the friendship that we hope to gain from him will come back around to us and honor us.

Let us be very careful not to love the good which we see in our neighbor without reference to God. *"So that henceforth we know no one according to the flesh"* (2 Cor. 5:16).

In this human and sensitive way of knowing our neighbor, how many complications, how many dangers, how many worries, and ultimately how many bitter disappointments, for man is only dust and ashes!

Let us look at our neighbor with God's eyes, happy if we see him in God, wishing to see him there if he is not, convinced that he can get there as long as he has not died.²⁴⁴

2. Charity according to St. Paul

St. Paul in his description of charity, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:1-13), is talking specifically about fraternal charity, and he takes it very far.

We are often mistaken about the nature of charity. We are wrong to take it for a less virile virtue than the virtue of truth, because in a sense it is the divine virtue, if I may put it that way, since it names the very essence of God. God is charity.

So would God be lacking that strength, that virility, if we can call it that? In reality, the virtue of charity is extremely demanding. It allows for no half-measures.

When we read St. Paul, we realize that it really takes a great deal of effort to practice charity: *"If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."* So the expression of charity is not necessarily the beautiful words we may say.

²⁴⁴ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

“And if I have prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, yet do not have charity, I am nothing.” These are very grave statements on the part of St. Paul because they show us that, without grace, any good we may do will gain us no merit. That is the case of many people who are in false religions. We don’t deny that there may be good acts done by people not in the state of grace, but those acts are not meritorious for eternal life. Perhaps God is going to take that good into account and give them actual graces that will prompt their conversion and then give them sanctifying grace. But in themselves, their actions give them no merit.

“And if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing.” So if we do not have the grace of God, that is to say that supernatural charity which God gives to us by the infusion of grace, anything we do is useless.

So how does charity find expression? What are its manifestations? How can we know if we possess it? *“Charity is patient, is kind,”* that is to say it condescends. Obviously, that may sound at first like a kind of weakness. That’s not true, though, because charity sees things in the long term, it sees things more deeply. So it is not worried about passing difficulties, it is patient in its effort, in relationships. It remains stable. It is kind, in the sense, I think, that it listens willingly even to things which are without interest or which may be disagreeable, may be unpleasant. It has that gentle condescendence to listen, it knows how to share the sufferings of others.

“Charity does not envy.” So, even if it sees that other people have qualities which it does not have, it is not jealous of their gifts and does not envy them in a disordered manner. It doesn’t have an itch to criticize those people in order to diminish them in some way, feeling a sense of inferiority that drives it to want to make them smaller and bring them down to its own level, or sometimes even lower so it can look down on them. Charity is not envious.

“Charity is not pretentious,” that is it doesn’t make a ruckus in order to show that it’s doing something, bringing itself to the forefront, out of a certain vanity. Charity acts when the time is right, when God asks for it, but it does not act simply to make itself stand out.

It is not prideful, so “*it is not puffed up,*” it does not try to show other people up or vaunt the gifts it may have, to no purpose. It doesn’t try to dominate other people.

“*It is not ambitious.*” So it does not seek high offices or particular distinctions even if, in fact, it is capable of receiving them, even if it would be just that it receive them.

“*It is not self-seeking,*” seeking its own interest, its selfishness. In all of its activity, it seeks only the interest of God or its neighbor.

“*It is not provoked.*” That is not always easy. There are so many occasions to become irritated, to become angry or indignant. Certainly there do exist good kinds of indignation, good kinds of anger, but charity is not going to get aggravated over nothing, it is not constantly in a state of annoyance, a state of bitterness, a stewing kind of anger at the world around it.

“*It thinks no evil,*” it does not make rash judgments. This is one of the most serious things in any life in community, because it can easily give rise to a certain coldness, and there can even be a certain animosity that settles in among people who live together. Members of a community can really be wounded to think that someone else assumed they acted with bad intentions whereas in fact they really did not... Charity may realize after the fact, when everything comes to light, that an action truly was wrong. But as long as there is no real proof, the idea won’t even occur to it to believe that other people are acting wrongly.

Charity does not rejoice at seeing someone fall into sin or act badly. It is not going to imitate the person who says to himself, “I would never have done that; he has fallen, and it serves him right; he is not nearly as good as I am.” “*Charity does not rejoice over wickedness*” and it tries to raise the soul out of sin. Consequently, it is going to pray for the one who does evil.²⁴⁵

“*Charity does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth.*” Genuine friendship consists in bringing others toward God and therefore encouraging what is of God in them, as St. Thomas puts it.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 24, 1976.

²⁴⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 25, a. 1, *ad* 1.

“Charity bears with all things.” Definitely, we have to interpret this in the sense that the Church means to teach it. To bear with all things means to endure all outrages, humiliations, contradictions in union with the cross of our Lord, like our Lord, who suffered everything and even death, giving His life for those He loves. *“Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for those he loves”* (Jn. 15:13), our Lord said. I think it is in this sense that St. Paul says that charity endures all things and is ready to give its life, if necessary, for the salvation of souls and for the glory of God.

“Charity believes all things.” I think St Paul means that the first movement of charity is to believe what others say. That comes back a little bit to what I was saying about rash judgment. But it does not mean that we go so far as to believe things which are against the faith, precisely because, one line before, he just said that charity rejoices with the truth. So we are not supposed to believe what is false, obviously! But it’s the interior disposition of the soul which consists in willingly believing what people say, without falling into credulity in the bad sense of the word. Simple souls sometimes fall into an excessive credulity about what is told to them, on all sides, by messages, by visions or what have you. There we obviously have to be very, very, very prudent.

“It hopes all things.” In spite of all of the difficulties, all of the contradictions, charity still hopes. Why? Because true charity puts its hope in God, in Him who is the source of all good. Whence the words which we sing in the *Te Deum*: *“In You have I hoped, I shall never be confounded”* (Ps. 30:2), I will never be deceived. Wanting the truth, wanting the good of others and the glory of God, charity hopes, and it is right to hope because it is sure, it is certain that its hope will be accomplished, if not right away, at least in the future.

“It endures all things.” I believe that we have to understand this in the sense of a certain optimism. Charity encourages everything that is good, everything that is in conformity with the truth. The first movement of charity is to encourage. If we see somebody who is well-intentioned, who has a desire to do good, well then charity is going to give him encouragement, even if afterwards we have to rectify any disorder there might be. We could say that charity is always optimistic and never pessimistic, still for the same reason: because charity trusts in God. Its strength is God, its support is God. All of these attitudes of charity are marvelous,

excellent, and once again they really make life in community and life in society enormously easier.²⁴⁷

3. The order of charity

St. Thomas speaks of the order of charity toward our neighbor. Who are those whom we should love the most? St. Thomas makes a distinction between what will be the order of charity in Heaven and the order of charity here below. In Heaven, we will love those who are most perfect, that is, those who are nearest to God:²⁴⁸ the Virgin Mary first, who is all immersed in God, and then all the saints.

Whereas here below, *in via*, although this principle still holds true, the human condition creates a nearness to certain people, and at the same time creates for us a duty to love those people in proportion to their nearness.²⁴⁹

As the word itself implies, our neighbor is one who is near. Those who are the closest to us are our parents, our brothers and sisters, our family. And then after that it extends to members of the same community. So there is a certain duty to love first those who are near to us and then those who are far.

It is a fairly common fault to get along better with those who are far than with those who are near. We know better the faults of those who are near. “No man is great to his valet,” as the saying goes. Well, it is the same within our family. So we can have a tendency not to have very much consideration for those who are close to us and to get along very well with those who hardly know us and who appreciate us, who flatter us, who are very happy to receive us, and so on.

To avoid this stumbling block, we always need to try to love more deeply those who are near to us and to do good to them first (*cf. 1 Tim. 5:8*).²⁵⁰

4. Fraternal correction

We can also use this order of charity to understand fraternal correction. St. Thomas has a whole chapter on the subject.²⁵¹ There

²⁴⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 26, 1976.

²⁴⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 26, a. 13.

²⁴⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 26, a. 6.

²⁵⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 6, 1981.

again, as always, he gives us principles. Some people tend to do too much of it, and other people don't do enough. Certain people have a tendency to make comments sometimes which are a little bit unpleasant, which are not always very kind. We discover a failing in this person or that person, and right away we make an unpleasant comment, we make some disagreeable remark, instead of asking ourselves, as St. Thomas puts it, "Is fraternal correction a matter of precept?" Here he introduces a great deal of nuance. He says, "Acts of virtue must not be done anyhow, but by observing the due circumstances, which are requisite in order that an act be virtuous; namely, that it be done where, when, and how it ought to be done."

You see, St. Thomas brings in a great deal of nuance because, as he also says, "Since the disposition of whatever is directed to the end depends on the formal aspect of the end, the chief of these circumstances of a virtuous act is this aspect of the end, which in this case is the good of virtue... Now fraternal correction is directed to a brother's amendment: so that it is a matter of precept, in so far as it is necessary for that end, but not so as we have to correct our erring brother at all places and times."²⁵²

And he even says that we can omit fraternal correction, in certain cases, out of charity, "if a man refrains from chiding and reproving wrongdoers, because he awaits a suitable time for so doing, or because he fears lest, if he does so, they may become worse, or hinder, oppress, or turn away from the faith, others who are weak and need to be instructed in a life of goodness and virtue."²⁵³

So it is a question of prudence and judgment, to know when we are held to correct our brothers.

Next St. Thomas poses the question, "Is a man bound to correct his superior?" First he starts by presenting the objections: "It would seem that it is forbidden..." He offers three objections and then he answers, "On the contrary, Augustine says in his Rule: 'Show mercy not only to yourselves, but also to him who, being in the higher position among you,'" that is, your superior, "'is there-

²⁵¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 33.

²⁵² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 33, a. 2.

²⁵³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 33, a. 2, *ad* 2, quoting St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, bk. I, ch. 9.

fore in greater danger.’²⁵⁴ But fraternal correction is a work of mercy” – it is to have pity. “Therefore even superiors ought to be corrected.”

He makes distinctions, though: “Since, however, a virtuous act needs to be moderated by due circumstances, it follows that when a subject corrects his prelate, he ought to do so in a becoming manner, not with impudence and harshness, but with gentleness and respect. Hence St. Paul says: ‘*An ancient man rebuke not, but entreat him as a father*’ (1 Tim. 5:1). Wherefore Dionysius finds fault with the monk Demophilus for rebuking a priest with insolence, by striking and turning him out of the church.”²⁵⁵

And then, in the answers to the objections, he specifies, “To withstand anyone in public exceeds the mode of fraternal correction, and so Paul would not have withstood Peter then, unless he were in some way his equal as regards the defense of the faith. But one who is not an equal can reprove privately and respectfully. Hence St. Paul in writing to the Colossians tells them to admonish their prelate: ‘*Say to Archippus: Fulfill thy ministry*’ (Col. 4:17). It must be observed, however, that if the faith were endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly. Hence Paul, who was Peter’s subject, rebuked him in public, on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning faith, and, as the gloss says, ‘Peter gave an example to superiors, that if at any time they should happen to stray from the straight path, they should not disdain to be reproved by their subjects.’”²⁵⁶

A person might say that, “To presume oneself to be simply better than one’s prelate, would seem to savor of presumptuous pride; but there is no presumption in thinking oneself better in some respect, because, in this life, no man is without fault. We must also remember that when a man reproves his superior charitably, it does not follow that he thinks himself any better, but merely that he offers his help to one who, ‘being in the higher position among you, is therefore in greater danger.’”²⁵⁷

Ah, yes, God knows it; unfortunately, right now, we are being forced to do what St. Thomas is describing, on account of a

²⁵⁴ St. Augustine, *Letter 211*.

²⁵⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 33, a. 4.

²⁵⁶ Cf. St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ch. 15. *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 33, a. 4, ad 2.

²⁵⁷ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 33, a. 4, ad 3.

danger to the faith. We are being forced to tell bishops, and even Rome, and even the pope, that there are certain things that are dangerous for the faith.

So, obviously, we are treated as prideful: "You are full of pride to set yourselves up against Rome." St. Thomas answered that objection: "When a man reproves his superior charitably, it does not follow that he thinks himself any better, but merely that he offers his help to one who 'is in the higher position among you.'" If St. Paul allowed himself to act in that way toward St. Peter, he says it clearly, it was as a defender of the faith. It is because there was a danger for the faith itself that St. Paul rebuked St. Peter (*Gal. 2:14*).²⁵⁸

5. The virtues of politeness

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.²⁵⁹ 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 our goods to our neighbor. Those who love their neighbor wish to make him happy and they show it by giving him their goods. So to live in good company 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 some of what we own. That is how St. Thomas treats of the social virtues.²⁶⁰

6. For a fruitful apostolate

Archbishop Lefebvre is going to describe the qualities necessary for being an apostle. But first he indicates two pitfalls to be avoided, the first by defect, the other by excess.

²⁵⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 7, 1981.

²⁵⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae q. 109-119.

²⁶⁰ Sermon, Ecône, May 28, 1987, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 257.

It is not true charity to be a party to leaving minds in error and souls in sin. It is one thing to have an understanding for souls and to realize the path which brought them to error and sin; it is something else entirely to give error a semblance of truth and sin the appearance of virtue, making the person we are speaking to imagine that he has found the truth and that he is in the right. Obviously, it is a question of nuance, but true charity, made up entirely of faith in Jesus Christ, knows what it is about and will never put its light under the bushel-basket. It is easier never to contradict, always to approve and to create for ourselves an easy popularity at the expense of truth, that is to say, at the expense of our Lord Himself; when we do so, we are seeking ourselves and we are not practicing true charity.²⁶¹

St. James poses the question, *"Who is wise and instructed among you? Let him by his good behavior show his work in the meekness of wisdom."* (Jas. 3:13) Otherwise, he adds, *"it is not true wisdom, it is not true charity, which descends from Heaven. It is bitter zeal. If you are always looking for contentious conversations in your hearts, do not glory and be liars against the truth. For that wisdom does not come from God, but it is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where there is bitter zeal and contentiousness, there is instability and every wicked deed. True wisdom that is from above is first of all chaste, then peaceable, moderate, humble; it persuades."* (Cf. Jas. 3:14-17)

You see, true wisdom persuades, so it is a true source of apostolate; it is persuasive. *"It is in harmony with good things, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation. The fruit of that wisdom is peace."* (Cf. Jas. 3:17-18)

That is strikingly close to what St. Paul says about charity in chapter 13 of the Epistle to the Corinthians, as we have just seen. True wisdom is not in contention, it is not in that kind of personal pride which wants to get its ideas across, which does not understand other people, which has no mercy, which has no comprehension for others. In order to convert someone, we have to try to see him, to hear him, to know exactly what his path has been. And so we have to wait, be patient. How did he reach that point? So we cannot right away launch into opposition, go on the offensive, or we will just be pushing him away.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Letter to Brother Priests, Dakar, July 29, 1960; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 112.

²⁶² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 18, 1977.

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 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 living holiness.

We cannot consider this combat 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 that you 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.²⁶³

²⁶³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 26, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 166-168.

Some people grow discouraged when they don't see the fruits of their apostolate because they are counting too much on themselves. When we see the mediocre success of all of our efforts in our apostolate, we have to plunge with greater fervor into prayer.

The slowness of this work of grace in a soul and the difficulties we meet in the apostolate should give us a deeper piety, a greater piety, especially for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, because the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the source of grace, the fountain of all graces.²⁶⁴

6. *Lord, give me Your charity!*

Charity is the divine life in us, by participation. Grace, healing and elevating nature, lifts us along with zeal to the accomplishment of that law of charity; lifts us toward God and His Son Jesus Christ in adoration, devotion and prayer; lifts us to go toward our neighbor in and through the love of God, so that he might be in God through Christ. In order to realize this union with God, this movement toward God, charity buries itself in humility and in obedience or abandonment, awaiting that moment of final, definitive dwelling in God.²⁶⁵

We acquire this charity through constant efforts and by assiduous prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot hope to receive all of the graces that transform us in the charity of our Lord without meditation, without prayer, without asking our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁶⁶

And so to close these reflections on charity, let us say to our Lord, "Lord, give me Your charity, communicate to me Your charity. You gave it to me at my baptism; make me not lose it by sin; make me keep it. Increase that charity in me, give me Your Holy Spirit."²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Conference to future deacons, June 1, 1990.

²⁶⁵ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²⁶⁶ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

²⁶⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 26, 1984, 10th conference.

3.

THE MORAL VIRTUES

To the practice of the theological virtues, it is necessary to join that of the moral virtues, which can all be reduced to the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. They govern our conduct in order to allow us to reach God.

The virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are natural virtues and supernatural virtues. Why double the virtues that we can acquire by nature with supernatural virtues that come to us by grace? It comes from the fact that God has raised us to an end infinitely superior to that which we would have had by nature alone. Our first parents lost grace through original sin and lost the balance of their natural faculties through the wounds that I spoke to you about earlier. That's why, if we want to acquire and increase our natural virtues, we have to rediscover our supernatural destiny through baptism, through the sacraments and through the holy Mass, and practice our supernatural virtues.²⁶⁸

1. PRUDENCE

In his treatise on the virtues, St. Thomas Aquinas grants a large place to prudence.²⁶⁹ In ordinary cases, prudence is enough to guide us, but in confusing and unexpected situations, the gift of counsel is necessary.

Those who live in the world have to practice the virtue of prudence. In a certain way, they have an even greater need of the virtue of prudence than religious do because, when a person is under an authority, he trusts the authority for his conduct; whereas when a person has to act for himself, he is responsible for his own actions, and all the more so if he is in charge of a family.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

²⁶⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 47-56.

²⁷⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1984.

1. *What is prudence?*

We easily have a false idea of prudence. We easily imagine that it makes you timorous, fearful; that it hinders action and reins it in. Serious mistake! On the contrary, prudence is the golden rule of action. It guides action, encourages it, sustains it, gives it its constancy, its firmness, its success, its true success, which is sanctification and the glory of God.²⁷¹

St. Thomas defines prudence as “right reason in things to be done,”²⁷² a just consideration directing action. You see right away the capital importance of this virtue. Prudence is the center governing the exercise of all of our virtues, even our faith, and it makes it so we act according to faith and right reason.²⁷³

It is not only a speculative virtue, but a practical virtue. It takes counsel, discusses, chooses the solution and intimates the order to execute, and finally watches over the execution. It is the mistress of the house, savvy, intelligent, active, methodical, persevering. It keeps its eyes on the ideal to attain and is responsible for ordering and setting the faculties to their task, taking into account all of the circumstances of life.²⁷⁴

Prudence becomes apparent in judgment especially, in the answers we give, in our manner of expressing ourselves. I am not only talking about the virtue of natural prudence, but of supernatural prudence also.²⁷⁵

The fact of placing our soul in front of its supernatural end is truly an act of great prudence. In our actions, we always need to ask ourselves, *Quid hoc ad aeternitatem?* What relation does my present action have, practically speaking, with my eternity? That is what the saints are always asking themselves, obviously, and especially Ignatian saints.²⁷⁶ Is what I am doing truly leading me on the path of my supernatural end, the path of the beatific vision, of the eternal happiness to which I am destined?²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²⁷² *Recta ratio agibilium* (*Summa Theologica*, II^{ae}, q. 47, a. 2).

²⁷³ Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

²⁷⁴ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²⁷⁵ Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

²⁷⁶ For example St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

²⁷⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1984.

2. *Prudence enlightened by faith*

If prudence is not enlightened by the virtue of faith in order to know exactly what our last end is, then our judgment may well deviate. We run the risk of not sufficiently considering the importance of the goods which God wants to give us, the importance of the spiritual compared to the material, the importance of eternity compared to time. The awareness of the shortness of life, the difficulties we have in resisting temptations, lead us to make certain decisions that we would not otherwise have made. So it is that souls make the decision to enter the religious life, or take resolutions to lead a more ascetic life, a life of combat against the forces which draw them toward evil, and to have a more profound, more perfect spiritual life.²⁷⁸

3. *The three acts of prudence*

Three acts make up 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 don't take the time to consider how we ought to act. So we launch into action before even reflecting. Precipitation leads to rashness.²⁷⁹ We think we know instinctively what we ought to do without needing to take counsel.

St. Thomas Aquinas has an article on the subject which 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. 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."

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

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 53, a. 3, ad 2.

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.* 6:35). Now it is a mark of docility to be ready to be taught: and consequently docility is fittingly reckoned a part of prudence."²⁸⁰ 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 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."²⁸¹ The gift which perfects prudence is therefore the gift of counsel.

Next after counsel comes judgment, that is, the choice among means proposed by counsel. The virtue which perfects the act of choice is *synesis*, or good sense, and also the sense of exceptions, which we call *gnomé*.²⁸² The vices contrary to judgment are on the one hand a defect of intelligence; on the other hand thoughtlessness: not knowing how to ponder all of the reasons for acting.²⁸³

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.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 49, a. 3.

²⁸¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 52, a. 1, *ad* 1.

²⁸² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 49.

²⁸³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 53, a. 4.

²⁸⁴ *Retreat*, Ecône, January 1978; *cf.* *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 262-264.

4. *Prudence in the Gospel*

The Gospel praises the prudent man. The virtue of prudence leads us to our final end, by making us perform actions proper to attaining it.

Certain statements of our Lord in the Gospel are the clear recommendation of that practical shrewdness which we call prudence, and the word itself is not lacking. It's the case in the parable of the unfaithful steward, suddenly obliged to render an account of his stewardship (*Lk. 16:1-8*). The man is anxious about the future. He starts to deliberate on what he is going to do once he is deprived of his employment. He could work or he could beg, the simple solutions, but he is not happy with either one. He finds another, more artful solution, in forgiving part of the debt of those who owe something to his master, while he is still in his functions. He makes friends for himself in view of his need. He receives praise in the Gospel because he acts prudently. It goes without saying that the iniquity of his dealings is absolutely not being held up as an example, but rather the shrewdness with which he extricates himself from a difficult situation. And Jesus deplors the fact that the children of this world show more ingenuity in their affairs than the children of light in the acquisition of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Here is the example that our Lord was wanting to give: "You see that man? He was shrewd in reaching his goal. And what about you? What are you doing to reach your goal?" What are we doing to reach our end? How many never attain that end? How many turn away from their end? How many are not truly practicing the virtue of prudence?

In the same sense, you see the disciples realizing where their true interests lay and right away going out to distribute all their goods to the poor – and so making the poor their introduction to everlasting dwellings. St. Thomas makes the comment that one of the vices most contrary to the virtue of prudence is actually avarice, an attachment to the goods of this world.²⁸⁵ It's fairly normal. Attachment to the good things of this world makes us see more the things of this world than the things of eternity, so it turns us away from the things of eternity.

²⁸⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 118, a. 5, *ad* 1.

He also tells us that another obstacle to the virtue of prudence is lust.²⁸⁶ Lust, which is also a good of the senses, turns us off the path to our end and makes us lose the understanding of the end.

The parable of the wise virgins and the foolish virgins (*Mt.* 25:1-13) carries an identical message. Our Lord is not presenting the parable to recommend vigilance, because all of the ten virgins fell asleep until the arrival of the bridegroom. But when he came, the prudent virgins were able to light their lamps because they were well supplied with oil. The others realized they had run out of oil. They quickly went to buy some, but when they came back it was too late. The Gospel praises the foresight of the first. In the others, it blames the corresponding deficiency. The imprudent virgins did not stand out as having any malice, and yet they were denied entry to the hall of the marriage feast.

What does the man do who wants to build a tower and the king who wants to wage war (*Lk.* 14:28-33)? Before undertaking anything, each one of them sits down to deliberate more at his ease. The one calculates whether he is rich enough to see to the expense; the other ponders whether it is wise, with ten thousand men, to go out to meet an enemy with twenty thousand.

Those are examples of prudence that are given in the Gospel.

Moreover, that man is called prudent who builds his house on the rock (*Mt.* 7:24). But the one who builds it on the sand is a fool, senseless (*Mt.* 7:26). "*Faithful and prudent servant whom his Master has set over His household*" (*Mt.* 24:45),²⁸⁷ is what is said for the Mass of confessors and pontiffs, a Mass which occurs many times over the course of the liturgical year.

Finally, the Lord wants the disciples to join the prudence of serpents to the simplicity of doves (*Mt.* 10:16). Prudence here means the art of escaping dangers.

So the Gospel is far from containing only exhortations to generosity and love. No one will enter the Kingdom if he has not also demonstrated certain qualities of mind and understanding.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 53, a. 6.

²⁸⁷ *Fidelis servus et prudens quem constituit Dominus super familiam suam.*

²⁸⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1984.

5. Prudence in our everyday life

To make an inventory of the resources at our disposal, to organize them and to put them to work with moderation, with order, is to bring our cooperation to the work of Providence.

By resources, we mean everything that this same Providence places at our disposal: everything from our health, our time, our spiritual faculties, all of the gifts received from the Church, whatever material means we have, the help of our auxiliaries, the conditions of place, of climate, and also the people toward whom we are sent. All of that has to be studied, to be considered with calm, with prudence. Have we taken the trouble to sit down and reflect, as they did in the parables? *Sedens computavit, "Sitting down, he calculated"* (Lk. 14:28).

The prudent person reflects, takes counsel, examines his possibilities and, based on them, works without tiring and without rebellion. Most of all we have to be careful never to lose our peace of soul or let our zeal be worn down.²⁸⁹

Over the course of a day, you constantly have choices to make. During your work time, outside of what is set down by your superiors, you have the choice among a variety of occupations or in the way you organize your time. Then, during your free time, there are likewise choices to be made: "Shall I do this or shall I not do it?" None of that is indifferent. All of these acts have a moral value and we will have to render an account of them to our Lord who is going to be our Judge.

That is where we see those who really have virtue and those who do not; those who are tempted to let themselves be influenced by their passions, by their own desires and who do not reflect before taking action, and those who on the contrary judge, "No, I will not do it"; or, "Yes, I am going to do it, I can do it, I ought to do it." And then they act.²⁹⁰

With the ideal firmly established in the intellect, prudence will be diligent, intelligent, resourceful. And together with the gift of counsel, it is going to do everything for the soul to be transformed, divinized, within the very framework of our day-to-day

²⁸⁹ Letter to Brother Priests, No. 24, Dakar, May 1, 1952, in *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, pp. 36-37.

²⁹⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 27, 1984.

existence. Just as the businessman seizes every opportunity to conduct business, to earn money, to develop his income, the truly spiritual soul finds that everything lifts it toward the good.

It is something worth reflecting on and worth admiring that the gift of counsel corresponds to the beatitude of the merciful²⁹¹ because, ultimately, everything comes back to mercy – which does not mean covering up the reality of sin and acting as though it didn't exist, but on the contrary seeing miseries, understanding them, healing them even to sacrifice of oneself.²⁹²

2. JUSTICE

A definition of justice is going to introduce two virtues that are connected to it: religion and obedience.

1. What is justice?

The virtue of justice is fundamental, capital. Justice is what impels us to fulfill our duties toward God and toward our neighbor. So practically speaking it is the virtue which commands all the acts of our life. Justice is rendering to each one his due: to render to God what is due to Him, to render what is due to those who participate in the authority of God, to all legitimate authorities, and to render to our neighbor what is due to him. So it is a very important virtue.

The three characteristics of justice are: *alteritas, æqualitas, debitum* (otherness, equality and that which is due). So there have to be two persons, something owed by the one to the other, and an equality between what is rendered and what is due. That is the model of perfect justice.²⁹³

2. Religion

1. What is the virtue of religion?

Religion is a virtue by which we render to God the worship due to Him. Religion is one of the virtues related to justice, and so there is a strict duty to render to God what is due to Him.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^æ, q. 52, a. 4.

²⁹² Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

²⁹³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1985, 4th conference.

²⁹⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

2. A virtue annexed to justice

Religion is a virtue annexed to the virtue of justice. Why only annexed? Because it does not contain all three notes of justice.

There is no *æqualitas*, no equality between God and us, but there is *alteritas*, otherness: there is God and there is us, and in fact that is what is so beautiful, what is so great. Finally there is the *debitum*, the thing owed by us, but not owed by God. So if the *debitum*, the thing due, is according to the measure of what God is, imagine the behavior we should have before Him. Of course we can never fully render to God everything we owe Him, but we have to try to do so in all the measure of our poor means, with grace, with all the gifts that He has given us, in order to be truly religious men, or rather to be men, quite simply, because man is a religious being.²⁹⁵

We need to practice our virtue of religion. That virtue of religion is what is most intimate to man, even on a natural level. The virtue of religion at the heart of the virtue of justice is the expression of what we are before God and before our neighbor. To render the duties which we owe to God, duties to our neighbor, is to practice the virtue of justice. We have duties toward God that we have to carry out, and the first duty is precisely the virtue of religion.²⁹⁶

3. The acts of the virtue of religion

The acts of the virtue of religion are presented below succinctly. Considering the place of prayer and of the Mass in the Christian life, these themes will be developed in the third book which treats of the means of sanctification.

The acts of the virtue of religion are listed in that priceless book, the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas. Just listing them shows us what a religious soul ought to be, a soul who wants to resemble our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁹⁷

St. Thomas says that the first act of the virtue of religion is devotion. "Devotion is derived from *devote*; wherefore those persons are said to be *devout* who, in a way, devote themselves to

²⁹⁵ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1985, 4th conference.

²⁹⁶ Sermon, Lyon, February 8, 1976.

²⁹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

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.”²⁹⁸ It is an interior attitude of donation, of total dedication to God.

St. Thomas specifies, “We pay God honor and reverence, not for His sake (because He is of Himself full of glory to which no creature can add anything), but for our own sake, because by the very fact that we revere and honor God, our mind is subjected to Him; wherein its perfection consists.”²⁹⁹

We can add nothing to the glory of God. Therefore religion is a virtue which is addressed to God, but which is for our good. So it is not for God’s benefit that we pray. It is to sanctify us, to raise us up, to assimilate us to God.³⁰⁰

St. Thomas continues, “Now the human mind, in order to be united to God, needs to be guided by the sensible world... Therefore the internal acts of religion take precedence of the others and belong to religion essentially, while its external acts are secondary, and subordinate to the internal acts.”³⁰¹

Consequently, in order to accomplish the virtue of religion, let us not look first at the exterior acts, that is, vocal prayers, but rather at the interior attitude of our soul toward God.³⁰²

The spiritual life does not consist in feeling emotions, in feeling an immense desire for union with God. It is not about having practically the gift of tears or of so longing to be united to God that it’s all we can think of day in and day out. That’s all fine, but it is not where devotion lies. So what is the criterion of our devotion to God Himself? What does God look at in us to know if we are pleasing to Him? Look in the Gospel, it is our Lord Himself who says it: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15). When people tell Him that His mother and His brethren wanted to see Him, He says, “Who is My mother and who are My brethren?...

²⁹⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 82, a. 1.

²⁹⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 81, a. 7. Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 24, 1984, 6th conference.

³⁰⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

³⁰¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 81, a. 7.

³⁰² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 24, 1984, 6th conference.

Whoever does the will of My Father." (Mt. 12:48, 50) That is what counts.³⁰³

Next St. Thomas names prayer, *oratio*, as a second act of religion.³⁰⁴ He has considerations on prayer which are very accurate, very interesting and very useful.³⁰⁵

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."³⁰⁶ 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 acknowledge before Him that we are capable of nothing without Him, the Author of all good.³⁰⁷

Adoration is the third act of the virtue of religion.³⁰⁸ To adore God is to have that interior reverence before God who is our all, who is our Creator, who is our Redeemer, who shed His blood for us. How can we not adore Him, prostrate ourselves even exteriorly before Him, but most of all interiorly?³⁰⁹

We do need exterior adoration as well. If we are not giving worthy expression to our interior sentiment of adoration, we risk not actually having that interior sentiment of adoration, which means that submission, that oblation of ourselves to God, by which we submit all our will, our intellect, everything we are to this God who created us and who awaits us for eternity.

If even on a purely natural level the virtue of religion ought to be practiced, how much more so does it have to be practiced on a supernatural level? God willed to come among us. He became incarnate, wanting in a way to show us Himself how the religious man, the creature, ought to behave toward Him. Our Lord came to

³⁰³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 1st conference.

³⁰⁴ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 83.

³⁰⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 24, 1984, 6th conference.

³⁰⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae} q. 83, a. 3, *ad* 3.

³⁰⁷ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae} q. 83, a. 3. Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon-Wald, October 18, 1984, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 227.

³⁰⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae} q. 84.

³⁰⁹ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

earth. He prayed, He adored His Father. He showed us the meaning of religion. He gave Himself entirely to His Father on the cross, He offered Himself totally, completely, for the glory of His Father and the salvation of souls.³¹⁰

Adoration is a defining action, a disposition that will carry through the event of our death. Death is not going to change anything. The soul which is devoted to God, which has given itself to God, which adores God, will pass from earth to Heaven remaining in its devotion, in its adoration. Those are fundamental states of being which all men are meant to have, and not only monks and nuns. That is what the most Blessed Virgin Mary was. That was the state of the human soul of Jesus before His Father.³¹¹

And then the greatest act of the virtue of religion, says St. Thomas, an act which is exclusively for God, is sacrifice.³¹²

The most perfect act of religion is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass because it is the great prayer of our Lord. And since our Lord came to teach us how to return to our state as religious beings, to restore us not only in the state of natural religion, but supernatural religion, He teaches us to pray through His own prayer, by His own offering to God. At the altar, we unite ourselves to His own prayer, the great prayer, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is therefore the act *par excellence* of the virtue of religion.³¹³

Thus the Church enlightened by faith describes for us the acts of the virtue of religion: devotion, prayer, adoration, sacrifice. Those are the foundations of the virtue of religion which place us in a total dependence upon God; which place our whole selves in a state of reverence that is profound, complete and constant. We are always creatures, we are always redeemed, we are always baptized.

So there exist in our souls fundamental relations to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ, which ought never to change.

If there are hesitations, difficulties, trials over the course of our spiritual life, it is natural. God wills it for our sanctification. But we must never cast into doubt or call into question the fun-

³¹⁰ Sermon, Lyon, February 8, 1976.

³¹¹ Retreat for Benedictine Nuns, Lamairé, August 25, 1987, 4th conference.

³¹² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae} q. 85, a. 2. Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

³¹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1975.

damental principles of our piety, of our holy religion, of our devotion to God.³¹⁴

3. *Obedience*

After the virtue of religion, another virtue annexed to justice is obedience.

1. The origin of obedience

Obedience is not an arbitrary imposition of God's will upon our will. According to the very nature of God and of the creature, our life, our happiness as decided by God could not be realized without obedience.

Obedience does not date from the first sin, as suffering and penance do. Obedience belongs to the very nature of our state as creatures.³¹⁵ It became supernatural at the same time justice became supernatural, at the moment of creation of our first parents, created in a state of grace.

The book of *Ecclesiasticus*, in its second part, throws light on the question by comparing the obedience of beings without reason to the intelligent obedience of man. Thus, to obey is to live up to the perfection of justice, the perfection of order, the perfection of nature and of grace.

To disobey is to act with malice, to introduce disorder and death; it is separation from God necessarily: "*For just as by the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted just*" (Rom. 5:19).³¹⁶

2. What is obedience?

Obedience is the virtue which consists in executing precepts, whether formulated or tacit, which express the will of the superior. After praising the virtue and inviting his reader to an examination of conscience, Archbishop Lefebvre considers obedience in the broader sense of an offering of one's whole being to God.

³¹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, March 27, 1986.

³¹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 104, a. 1.

³¹⁶ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

All of the saints were first of all humble, and they were souls of obedience. We need to imbibe that spirit of reformation of self that consists in a total, complete abandonment of our own will, submitting ourselves without discussion and without hesitation to the will of God manifested by our superiors. That is the first and indispensable source of a deep and lasting reformation.³¹⁷

Let us examine ourselves concerning our relation with our superiors. Do we truly practice the virtue of obedience? Are we in that spirit of submission of our will to God, in the person of our superiors?³¹⁸

It is very easy to substitute our own will for the will of God. So pay close attention, that can be a fault which is natural to you, to want to do "your will," ultimately.

I give you this piece of advice: look for the objective and not the subjective will of God, and don't try to go faster than Providence, but just follow its pace.

There have to be proofs of the will of God that are objective and not just subjective. One of those proofs is that the superior wishes it, unless the superior himself is very clearly abandoning truth and objectivity in opposing himself to matters of faith, for example, as we are witnessing in the Church right now. If God is asking you to do something, He will give you the means to accomplish it. That dependence on God is indispensable. It is not because we have a sentiment of great fervor that we are necessarily charitable. The test of charity is the fulfillment of the will of God, and so it is total dependence on God. Our Lord Himself said it, "*You are My disciples if you fulfill My commandments. If you fulfill My commandments, We will come to You and will make Our abode in you.*" (Cf. *Jn.* 14:23) So it is very clear: holiness is dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ.³¹⁹

The virtue of obedience is at the very heart of our sanctification. It is at the heart of our whole life, both natural and supernatural. There can be no genuine natural life without obedience, and there can be no true supernatural life without obedience.

³¹⁷ Letter to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 1965, in *Lettres Pastorales et Ecrits*, p. 225.

³¹⁸ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 3, 1985, 4th conference.

³¹⁹ Recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

So what is obedience? In what does it consist? It seems to me that we could define it as the virtue of almighty God infusing itself in our soul, permeating our will.³²⁰

God makes Himself known to us by laws, by the commandments of God: love your God, love your neighbor. Right there is what we have to do. It is on that condition that we can live in the natural order as well as in the supernatural order.

So we have to have a desire to see that virtue penetrate our soul and take us whole and entire. We have to act in such a way as to submit ourselves entirely to the grace of God, to His strength, to His life. That is obedience. The harmonious development of the natural life and of the supernatural life, and by the very fact the acquisition of eternal life, is all going to be the fruit of that virtue of obedience.

Obedience ought to be a profound disposition of your soul: "I wish to be obedient to God all my life, to submit myself to God who wishes to give me His life in communicating to me His truth in my intellect by the natural light of my reason, but also and above all by the light of faith."

That is what your obedience should be. And by that interior disposition, that state of soul, you will transform your life. Your life will be fully conformed to the will of God.³²¹

3. Signified will and will of good pleasure

We have to submit all of our life, our actions, to two kinds of will of God: His will of good pleasure and His signified will.

Signified will is the law. The commandments of God, the divine law, natural law, positive human laws form a whole system of laws which ought to direct our actions, provided they are good, obviously.

And then there is God's will of good pleasure, that is to say, all that it pleases God to indicate to us through providential circumstances. You fall sick today and you have to go to the hospital. Well, what can you do but follow the schedule of the hospital? That is the law which will be the signified will of God for you. If

³²⁰ *Virtus Dei omnipotentis.*

³²¹ Sermon , Ecône, December 8, 1976.

tomorrow there were a general mobilization and you were obliged to deploy, what should you do? Deploy.

You have to put yourself in that spirit of total submission to the holy will of God. It is the sole means of truly sanctifying yourself: not to do your will but His. Our Lord showed us the example: our Lord said to His Father, "*Not My will but Thine be done*" (Lk. 22:42). May that be your ideal also, your fundamental principle, at every instant of your life.³²²

4. The example of the Holy Family

St. Paul summarized the life of our Lord in saying, "*He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death,³²³ and even to death on a cross. Therefore God also has exalted Him.*" (Phil. 2:8-9)

St. Bernard says, "*He was subject to them. Who was subject to whom? A God to men... Learn, O Man, to obey. Learn, O Earth, to be subject. Learn, O Dust, to submit!... Be you ashamed, vain ashes that you are. God humbles Himself, and do you exalt yourself? God becomes subject to men, and will you, eager to lord it over men, place yourself above your Maker?*"³²⁴

Finally, the Blessed Virgin herself, in the only word that she addressed to the disciples, at the wedding feast of Cana, at the very start of the ministry of Jesus, invites us to do what He says: "*Do whatever He tells you*" (Jn. 2:5). One word, a word that includes everything. She could not have spoken to us better.

And her example invites us to imitate her admirable *fiat*: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord*"³²⁵ (Lk. 1:38); her silence of dilection, of adoration, of submission.

St. Joseph is also a model of obedience. O admirable obedience of St. Joseph, without the least hesitation, throughout his entire life!³²⁶

5. The link between prayer and obedience

There is a close connection, a profound and even a supernatural connection, between prayer and obedience; between the vir-

³²² Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1974.

³²³ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 47, a. 2.

³²⁴ Sermon from the breviary for the feast of the Holy Family.

³²⁵ *Ecce ancilla Domini*.

³²⁶ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

tue of religion, which renders to God what is due to Him, and the fulfillment of God's will. I would almost say that they are one and the same thing, since prayer is an oblation. In prayer, one offers oneself in oblation to God for His praise, for His glory, and everyday life is where that oblation is carried out. Prayer is oblation expressed, while submission to the will of God is oblation practiced in our daily life.

We have to make our own activity the realization of God's will for us, so that it will be an oblation offered to God. Today God tells you, "You will be here, you will do this, here is your rule, here is your action..." You have to answer, "I am doing this because God wants it." This oblation that we make of all of our actions is therefore a genuine prayer, a continual prayer. On the contrary, if we fulfill our own will rather than fulfilling God's, we can no longer offer our actions to God.

So our heart has to be entirely open to the will of God in order that our actions might truly be an offering to God.³²⁷

6. The dilemma between faith and obedience

In the circumstances we are living today, in the confusion where the Church finds Herself today, we can ask ourselves, "How do we practice obedience?" We must not forget that our obedience toward God has to be total, for it is He who asks for obedience, it is to Him that we have to submit ourselves.

The light given by Revelation was handed down by the Apostles and by the successors of the Apostles, by Peter and by the successors of Peter for two thousand years. The Church was careful to hand down to us a truth in conformity with the truth of God.

And suddenly, by an unfathomable mystery, in our time, which is perhaps a time like no other in the history of the Church, these truths are no longer being handed on with fidelity as the Church passed them on for two thousand years. The facts are there, right in front of us. The truth was taught to children, taught to the poor. "*The poor have the Gospel preached to them,*" (Mt. 11:5), our Lord said to those sent by St. John the Baptist. Well, today, the Gospel is no longer preached to them. They are not given true bread, the bread of life. They have completely transformed our sacrifices, our sacraments, our catechisms. We are in sorrowful

³²⁷ Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

amazement. What is to be done in the face of this reality, this overwhelming, heart-rending, agonizing reality? We have to maintain the faith, obey what our Lord told us to believe for two thousand years.

In a time of confusion, in a time of disaggregation of the Church, what are we supposed to do except cling to what Jesus and His Church have taught? What has been defined infallibly once and for all by the sovereign pontiffs can never be changed. We have no right to modify the truth which is inscribed forever in our holy books, because that truth corresponds to the immutable truth of God. And we recite every day at None,³²⁸ “Ever unchanging in Yourself...” God remains always unchanging in Himself. So we have to attach ourselves in a permanent way to that truth which is taught to us and not let ourselves be troubled by the disorder that we see all around us today.³²⁹

This situation invites us to reflect very seriously on the true notion of the virtue of obedience, which depends not only on the authority commanding but also 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.³³⁰ 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 that are going to turn us away from God.³³¹

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

³²⁸ A little hour of the Divine Office which is recited before Vespers, as day inclines toward evening.

³²⁹ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1976.

³³⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 104, a. 1, ad 2.

³³¹ Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 461.

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.³³²

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.³³³

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.³³⁴

7. Know how to disobey in order to obey

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.³³⁵

Consequently, sometimes we have to know how not to obey in order to obey. It is true that God willed that truth be transmitted to us by the men who participate in His authority, but to the extent that these creatures are not faithful to the transmission of that truth, we cannot accept the orders and the obligations which they impose on us. Ultimately, obeying men who transmit unfaithfully the message which was given to them would be disobeying the message of our Lord Jesus Christ; it would be disobeying God.³³⁶

People understand the necessity of disobedience toward a fa-

³³² Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1987, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 461.

³³³ "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, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Æternus*, DS 3070; DZ 1836).

³³⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 463.

³³⁵ *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 148-9, and *Priestly Holiness*, p. 464.

³³⁶ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1976.

ther of a family who encourages his daughter to be a prostitute, or toward a civil authority that obliges doctors to provoke abortions and kill the innocent; but then they accept the authority of the pope absolutely unconditionally, as though he were infallible in all of his government and in every word he says. That betrays a patent misunderstanding of history and an ignorance of what infallibility really is.

Already St. Paul told St. Peter that he was no longer walking “according to the truth of the Gospel” (Gal. 2:14).

And then you have Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Libertas Præstantissimum* of June 20, 1888: “If, then, by anyone in authority, something be sanctioned out of conformity with the principles of right reason, and consequently hurtful to the commonwealth” – and all the more so if it is out of conformity with the principles of the faith – “such an enactment can have no binding force of law.” And a little farther down: “But where the power to command is wanting, or where a law is enacted contrary to reason, or to the eternal law, or to some ordinance of God, obedience is unlawful, lest, while obeying man, we become disobedient to God.”³³⁷

These principles of obedience to papal authority are simply what govern the relation of any delegated authority with his subjects. These same principles do not apply to divine authority, which is always infallible and indefectible and which can therefore never be found lacking.

There can be no lapse or failure either, to the extent that God has shared His infallibility with the pope and to the extent that the pope intends to call on that infallibility, which involves very specific conditions for its exercise.

Outside of these specific cases, the authority of the pope is fallible. It is therefore not beyond the realm of possibility that there be a duty of disobedience to the pope.³³⁸ So there are criteria for whether or not the actions of a pope oblige obedience.³³⁹

Once again, when the message that is handed on to us by men corresponds to the message of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have

³³⁷ Leo XIII, *Libertas Præstantissimum*, §10 and 13.

³³⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^æ, q. 33, a. 4, ad 2.

³³⁹ “L’obéissance peut-elle nous obliger à désobéir? [Can obedience oblige us to disobey?],” *La Lettre aux Anciens*, March 29, 1988, in *Fideliter*, June 29-30, 1988.

to obey, to the last iota. But when the orders that are given to us do not correspond to the orders that our Lord Jesus Christ gives to us, then superiors are not fulfilling the function for which they received authority from God. So it is that in such a case we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). That is why St. Paul himself said, “If an angel from Heaven, or myself, Paul, were to teach you another gospel than the one which we have announced to you, do not listen” (cf. Gal. 1:8).

And I am happy to repeat to you the same thing: if one day I taught you something contrary to what all the Tradition of the Church has taught us, do not listen to me. At that moment, you will have the right and even the duty not to obey me because at that point I am not being faithful to the mission God gave me.

That is what our obedience has to be: above all, obey God. That is the sole means for us to reach eternal life, for obedience is what leads us there. And in that, we follow the example of the most Blessed Virgin Mary. She was obedience itself. She is the most perfect model of obedience, the most beautiful, the most sublime. She is a perfect answer to the disobedience of the mother of humanity.

So let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary to teach us that obedience, to make us keep it to our dying day. May that be the grace which God grants you.³⁴⁰

3. FORTITUDE

1. *Fortitude in the service of justice*

The virtues of fortitude and temperance are meant to facilitate the exercise of the virtue of justice, since it is the virtue of justice which makes us fulfill our duties toward God, toward our superiors, toward our neighbor. There are obstacles which appear in the path of our fulfilling these duties. So the two virtues of fortitude and temperance are going to strive to eliminate those obstacles in order to allow full exercise to the virtue of justice.

In order to practice the virtue of justice, therefore to practice also that charity which God asks of us throughout our daily existence, there are two principal obstacles to overcome. The will is

³⁴⁰ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1976.

attracted by a delight contrary to reason: the virtue of temperance is going to help us keep it in check. And the will is drawn to deviate from the uprightness of reason because of the difficulties it encounters. It is difficult to reach God in the practice of religion, it is difficult to obey one's superiors, it is difficult to practice charity toward one's neighbor. So the virtue of fortitude is there to eliminate the obstacles in overcoming the fear inspired by difficulties.³⁴¹

2. *What is fortitude?*

Fortitude can be understood not only as a special virtue but first as a general disposition of firmness, which is presupposed in every virtue. The Angelic Doctor shows the relation of fortitude to magnanimity and to patience or perseverance; he brings out a number of nuances in specifying the nature of this virtue.

St. Thomas Aquinas defines fortitude as firmness of soul to attack and endure.³⁴²

There are two complementary virtues that are going to help in exercising the dispositions of soul present in the virtue of fortitude: on the one hand, magnanimity to take on the obstacle, which is called *aggredi*; on the other hand, patience to endure, to hold out before the obstacle, which is called *sustinere*.³⁴³

3. *The two acts of fortitude*

1. Magnanimity

We have to have a magnanimous soul so as not to give up at the least difficulty. That man is magnanimous who is not afraid of effort, who is not afraid to go forward to meet the obstacle. It is the hallmark of great souls.

Magnanimity reaches toward great things. It has great thoughts, it considers the gifts of God, it appreciates and seeks out what is great. And God and His gifts are indeed great. "*Great is the*

³⁴¹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

³⁴² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 123, a. 2. Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

³⁴³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 123, a. 1. Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

Lord, and great is His power" (Ps. 146:5).³⁴⁴ These considerations encourage us to seek after God. We do not stop at the means that lead to God, but we desire to reach God Himself and to be united to Him. Magnanimity is not contrary to humility, because humility looks at the deficiencies in oneself and the gifts of God in others, yet without denying the gifts one really has.³⁴⁵ Magnanimity is confident. "Confidence is hope strengthened by a strong opinion."³⁴⁶ It is therefore a virtue that helps us to forge ahead.³⁴⁷

Aggredi means to attack. We have to attack the very roots of evil in ourselves. For example, especially during Lent, we can take the resolution to combat a particular bad habit. We each have a dominant fault. So we say to ourselves: "This Lent, I am going to attack this particular thing; enough is enough, with this habit I have of doing this, or doing that... Here we go." We have to attack with the weapons of God, with prayer, with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, with the help of God and with constant prayer. Yes, we have to maintain that spirit of combat.³⁴⁸

2. Patience and perseverance

To endure difficulties, to overcome the obstacles which we meet in the fulfillment of our duties, we have to show patience and perseverance. Patience consists in "bearing evils with an equal mind."³⁴⁹ It means tolerating evils, undergoing them *æquo animo*, with an equal soul, with a tranquil soul, with a strong soul.

Moreover St. Thomas adds that the virtue of fortitude is found most particularly in that *sustinere*, in patience. He asks, "Whether endurance is the chief act of fortitude?" And he answers that it is.³⁵⁰

We have to endure the combat. We cannot let go, we can never let go. We must never say, "That's it, I've had enough! I'm just

³⁴⁴ *Magnus Dominus et magna virtus ejus.*

³⁴⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.

³⁴⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 129, a. 6, ad 3.

³⁴⁷ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

³⁴⁸ Conference to the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, March 3, 1988.

³⁴⁹ *Patientia est qua mala æquo animo toleramus*, St. Augustine, *De Patientia*, II, in *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 136, a. 1.

³⁵⁰ *Utrum sustinere sit principalis actus fortitudinis?* *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 123, a. 6. Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

going to rest. I'm not fighting any more, it's over, I'm done..." We want to continue the combat and ask our Lord to give us the virtue of fortitude. *Sustinere*, so it means enduring attacks. The devil uses everything he can to try to tear us away from our Lord, to separate us from Him. We do not want to listen to the devil, so we endure, we sustain. We have to endure, so we have to be always vigilant. How many times does our Lord repeat it: *vigilate, vigilate, vigilate, "watch and pray"* (Mt. 26:41). Look at the foolish virgins and the wise virgins (Mt. 25:1-3). The ones were wise, they were vigilant; the others said, "Oh, we can see about the oil later." So we have to watch, we have to endure, we must not fall asleep.³⁵¹

You see, perseverance is also a virtue annexed to the virtue of fortitude.³⁵² Our Lord said it, "*He who has persevered to the end will be saved*" (Mt. 10:23; 24:13).

May God give you the grace of final perseverance. It is the greatest grace which God can give us, since it is that perseverance which is going to open the doors of eternity for us, open the doors of Heaven.³⁵³

We have to strive for perseverance in our spiritual life. It used to be very common, but in fact we have lost what gives strength to the spiritual life: we have lost our Lord Jesus Christ crucified. It is the living cross of our Lord, that is, the holy Mass, which is supposed to give us the sense of virtue and which ought to be the source of our fortitude. That is everything.³⁵⁴

4. *Fortitude in Holy Scripture*

The virtue of fortitude is praised in Scripture, in the Old and in the New Testament alike. We have examples of fortitude in *David, Judith, Daniel*, in the prophets, in the *Psalms*. "*Thou art the rock of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever*" (Ps. 72:26).³⁵⁵ "*But be thou, O my soul, subject to God: for from Him is my patience. For He is my God and my savior: He is my helper, I shall not be moved.*" (Ps.

³⁵¹ Conference to the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, March 3, 1988.

³⁵² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 137, a. 2.

³⁵³ Sermon, Ecône, June 26, 1987.

³⁵⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

³⁵⁵ *Robur cordis mei et pars mea Deus in æternum*.

61:6-7) *"I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength: the Lord is my firmament, my refuge, and my deliverer"* (Ps. 17:2-3).

And then in the New Testament: *"Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Mt. 5:10). And St. Paul to the Hebrews: *"Therefore let us run with patience to the fight set before us; looking toward our model, our Lord Jesus Christ, who for the joy set before Him, endured a cross"* (cf. Heb. 12:1-2). Yes, what a strength for us Christians, for us Catholics, to have always this example of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ before our eyes! Our Lord shows us the example of all the virtues, and the manner we should practice them ourselves. St. James says, *"In patience is perfection"* (cf. Jas. 1:4). And a little farther, he exhorts us again to patience: *"Be patient until the coming of the Lord. Behold the farmer waits for the grain to rise and to bear its fruit. Therefore have a little patience and strengthen your hearts as you wait for the Lord. Do not worry about judging your brethren. Behold the Judge is at the door, He awaits. Look at the prophets, who also practiced patience. We call them blessed who have endured, sustinuerunt. You have heard that Job endured trials, and he ended by receiving the reward, for the Lord is merciful."* (Cf. Jas. 5:7-11).

And then, we also have as a model of fortitude the most Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. God knows if the most Blessed Virgin gave proof of a tremendous fortitude, particularly on Calvary, and St. Joseph in all his silent life.³⁵⁶

5. *An indispensable virtue today*

We are in the midst of difficulties of all kinds. We have seen for ourselves cases of people who did not hold strong in their combat. They did not have these virtues of patience and of perseverance.³⁵⁷

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

³⁵⁶ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 7th conference.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

the most Blessed Virgin Mary to give us that grace of final perseverance and of fidelity.³⁵⁸

4. TEMPERANCE

1. *What is temperance?*

Temperance moderates the appetites of our flesh and sometimes mortifies them to bring them into obedience, seconded by the supernatural virtue, by the help of God.

To temperance properly speaking which concerns drinking, eating and generation, we add moderation in the desire for wealth.³⁵⁹

Forty years after this succinct presentation of temperance, Archbishop Lefebvre comes back to the same theme, underlining the importance of humility, a virtue annexed to temperance.

In order to make temperance more concrete for you, I think the best thing is to show you how it appears in other virtues, certain specifically Catholic virtues, those which our Lord taught to us in a very special manner: humility, poverty and chastity.³⁶⁰

2. *Humility*

As temperance moderates the disordered appetite of concupiscence, so humility moderates the disordered appetite of pride, of vanity or of conceit.

1. What is humility?

Here is how we could define humility: "Humility is a moral virtue which inclines us out of reverence for God (and this is the important part, St. Thomas' definition) to abase ourselves and to keep ourselves in the place which we see to be due to us."³⁶¹ We have to abase ourselves in the sense that we have to put ourselves in our true place. To the extent that we lack humility, to that extent are we not in our true place. It is important to know that we live constantly in a certain illusion.

³⁵⁸ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 386.

³⁵⁹ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

³⁶⁰ Sermon, St. Michel Abbey, February 10, 1990.

³⁶¹ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 161, a. 1, *ad* 1, and a. 3, c. and *ad* 1.

Let us meditate on the meaning of these words, “to keep ourselves in the place which we see to be due to us.” The place which is due to us is the place of a creature, and of a creature redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we have two profound connections with God: a relation both as a creature and as a redeemed creature, which of course implies that we are sinners.

First, we are creatures. The more we delve into the idea of creature, the more we put ourselves in our true place before God.³⁶²

Humility is not a virtue that we need to aim at just because we are sinners. Certainly, that is an added reason, a very important reason to humble ourselves all the more on account of our sins. But already the simple fact of being a creature demands that we place ourselves as such before God.³⁶³

And we also need to deepen our understanding of the tremendous grace that God bestows on us in redeeming us and in making us His sons by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ought to meditate on our condition as sinners and on the great mercy of God toward us. That, too, will help us to put ourselves in our true place before our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is there anything more important here below than to put ourselves in our true place before God? We have no right not to be in our true place.³⁶⁴

2. The humility of Jesus before His Father

There are passages in the Gospel of St. John which surprise us. If our Lord is God, why does He give the impression that He is humbling Himself before His Father? We would be tempted to think that this humility comes from His humanity, from the lively sentiment of being but a creature. His body was a creature, His soul was a creature; is it only because He has placed Himself in this way in a human soul and in a human body that our Lord humbles Himself before His Father? Or is not the origin of that humility already present in the Trinitarian life, in the Holy Trinity Itself?³⁶⁵

³⁶² Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 15-16.

³⁶³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 28, 1975.

³⁶⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 16.

³⁶⁵ “One could also say, as Hilary does, that... the Father is not greater than

Certainly, there can be no question of humility in the strict sense within the most Holy Trinity, yet if humility is defined as, and is in fact, the virtue of truth, then who could be more acutely aware of that reception of all that one is and all that one has than the Divine Word, who hears constantly, *Ego hodie genui te, "this day have I begotten Thee"* (Ps. 2:7)?

This *hodie* is eternity. Our Lord is always begotten by the Father. Our Lord, the Son, knows that He is eternally indebted to His Father for all of His being, He who had no beginning and who is equal to His Father. But the fact that He is the Son, therefore engendered by His Father, gives Him that gratitude that all things come to Him from His Father; and it is true.

It is not simply a show of humility, it is not a sentiment with no correspondence to reality, and our Lord says so explicitly: not only because He has a human soul and a human body but because all of His divine nature comes to Him from His Father; all of His mission, all of His divine knowledge come to Him from His Father.

How could this Son, who is God, not render homage to His Father in recognizing His filiation? It is something very beautiful which then extends to and includes the humanity of our Lord.

It is all the more normal that our Lord humble Himself before His Father, because His human soul and body are obviously at a level infinitely below His divine Person. If our Lord expressed this sentiment of homage and gratitude for owing all things to His Father, how much more ought we, who are so inferior to Him, be in that continual realization of owing all things to God.³⁶⁶

3. Jesus Christ preached humility

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

the Son in power, eternity and greatness, but by the dignity of a grantor or source. For the Father receives nothing from another, but the Son, if I can put it this way, receives His nature from the Father by an eternal generation. So, the Father is greater because He gives; but the Son is not inferior, but equal, because He receives all that the Father has..." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, translated by Fabian R. Larcher, O.P.. Magi Books, Inc., Albany, N.Y., 1998, §1971.

³⁶⁶ *Le Mystère de Jésus*, pp. 162-164; cf. *The Mystery of Jesus*, pp. 150-151, 152.

feast and 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.³⁶⁷

4. Humility and charity

There is an attitude which is necessary, absolutely indispensable for our spiritual progress, and that is the virtue of humility. For St. Benedict, in the image of Jacob's ladder, which climbs up to Heaven, the two sides are our body and our soul, but the steps of the ladder are the levels of humility. St. Benedict therefore considers that a soul which advances in humility is advancing in perfection.³⁶⁸

Charity has such a need for humility in order to develop that it seems to me that the virtue of humility is right next to the virtue of charity. It may not appear so at first glance, and yet it is true, because for charity to exist we have to leave room for it, and what leaves room for charity is our retreating into nothingness, the denial of ourselves after the example of our Lord.³⁶⁹

At the last degree of humility, St. Benedict says that we have attained the perfection of charity. Why is that? Because, as St. Thomas explains, humility takes away the obstacles. The distinctive characteristic of humility is a conviction of the greatness of God and the littleness of man. That is why St. Benedict asks his monks to be humble.

He asks for no other virtues. He claims that a man who reaches the highest degree of humility is also at the greatest degree of charity. He considered that the virtue of humility was truly the fundamental virtue of his monks. That is how St. Benedict conceived of his spirituality. When we know the influence that the spirituality of St. Benedict had over all of religious life in the Church, we are forced to recognize the importance of the virtue of humility for our sanctification.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Priests' retreat, Libreville, handwritten notes, 1938, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 273.

³⁶⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

³⁶⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 28, 1975.

³⁷⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 15, 1977.

5. The basis of all the virtues

The virtue of humility, absolutely essential to the Christian, is at the basis of all the other virtues, because humility draws us to adoration and it flows from adoration. St. Thomas says it very clearly.³⁷¹ The humble man is humble because he is in the presence of God. He seeks to be always in the presence of God, and that life in the presence of God makes him humble and makes him continually aware of his nothingness, aware that he is nothing, that God is everything. That virtue of humility corresponds perfectly to the adoration we need to have toward God.³⁷²

6. 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.

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. 1 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.³⁷³

You see the humility of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, her simplicity, her self-effacement. You see the self-effacement of St. Joseph. Not a single word of his do we find recorded in the Gos-

³⁷¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 84, a. 2; q. 161, a. 3, *ad 1*, and a. 4, *ad 1*.

³⁷² Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 13, 1981; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 14.

³⁷³ Priests' retreat, Libreville, handwritten notes, 1938, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 276-277.

pel. So let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to give us their virtues.³⁷⁴

3. *The spirit of poverty*

The spirit of poverty depends on the virtue of temperance. Actually, to the virtue of temperance corresponds the gift of fear of the Lord, and to the gift of fear of the Lord corresponds the beatitude of poverty: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" (Mt. 5:3)³⁷⁵

1. What is the spirit of poverty?

Liberality is the virtue which corresponds to the spirit of poverty. It is the virtue of the man who is not attached to his goods, who distributes them reasonably, but with largesse and with goodness. The spirit of poverty is not meant to be only a virtue of monks and nuns or only of people who are literally poor; it is the Christian spirit, quite simply. Every Christian is meant to have the spirit of poverty. That spirit is basically the elimination of a certain proprietary attitude, a spirit of ownership. Not that ownership is a bad thing – quite the contrary. But the spirit of ownership means using and abusing the goods which God has given to us, as though we had given them to ourselves. We are going to have to render a strict account of anything we own. Here below we are only tenants. "*What do you have that you have not received?*" (1 Cor. 4:7) That poverty applies first to exterior goods: money, belongings, property of any kind.³⁷⁶

In a way, the spirit of poverty extends to all of our faculties. The spirit which we have to root out is a certain pursuit of possessions that can lead to avarice. We have to snuff out that desire to have always more, always better. The spirit of poverty even extends to the goods of our body. We can be too attached to our health until it becomes a preoccupation and we are afraid of suffering anything, we are afraid of a little fatigue. The spirit of poverty works that detachment from the goods of this world and from the goods of our body.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 4th conference.

³⁷⁵ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

³⁷⁶ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

³⁷⁷ Priests' retreat, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

2. Mammon vs. God

In St. Luke, we have some reflections on the subject of the spirit of poverty. *“Now one of the crowd said to Him, ‘Master, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But He said to him, ‘Man, who has appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?’ And He said to them, ‘Take heed and guard yourselves from all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’*

“And He spoke a parable to them, saying, ‘The land of a certain rich man brought forth abundant crops. And he began to take thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, for I have no room to store my crops? And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there will I store up all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, thou hast many good things laid up for many years; take thy ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Thou fool, this night do they demand thy soul of thee; and the things that thou hast provided, whose will they be?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich as regards God.” (Lk. 12:13-21)

So it is our Lord who encourages us not to try to amass wealth.

And St. Paul writes to Timothy, *“Godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and certainly we can take nothing out; but having food and sufficient clothing, with these let us be content. But those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many useless and harmful desires, which plunge men into destruction and damnation. For desire of money is the root of all evils, and some in their eagerness to get rich have strayed from the faith, and have involved themselves in many troubles. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; but pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness.” (1 Tim. 6:6-11)* That is the advice which Holy Scripture gives us; that is the spirit of poverty.³⁷⁸

3. Necessary detachment

Jesus Christ in the Gospel and the Church in the liturgy invite man not to be too preoccupied with temporal affairs and to be ready to renounce what he possesses.

I would like to remind you of the parable of our Lord which is in Chapter 14 of the Gospel of St. Luke. In giving us this parable, our Lord is making known to us the call which He addresses

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

to all those who are invited into His Kingdom. This call is signified by the invitation of certain people to the feast. Those who are invited make excuses. One has bought five pair of oxen, the other a field, a third has just been married, and in the end they all consider that they cannot come (Lk. 14:18-20).

That means that they refuse to enter the Kingdom of Heaven because they are preoccupied with the things of the earth. So the Lord says to His servants to go find the poor, the crippled, the blind and to fill the room, that is to say to invite those who, ultimately, are not attached to this world, those who have the spirit of poverty, to bring them into His Kingdom.

And our Lord explains this parable to His Apostles. He tells them, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not renounce all that surround him, all his family, all his friends, his parents, and himself, he cannot be My disciple*" (cf. Lk. 14:26). Then He continues with comparisons. The man who has to lead his army into battle reflects before going and asks himself if his troops are sufficient in comparison with those he will come against. And if he does not think he will be able to win, he goes to make a proposal of peace (Lk. 14:13-32). Our Lord is showing us there the virtue of prudence.

And then He adds, "*Anyone who does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be My disciple*" (Lk. 14:33). And He concludes with this sentence, "*If the salt of the earth loses its savor, what is it good for? All we can do is throw it out.*" (Cf. Lk. 14:34-35)

Through all of these images, our Lord is telling us imperatively to be detached.³⁷⁹

The Church in turn tells us throughout the year to "despise the things of the earth and to love the things of Heaven."³⁸⁰ These few words are constantly reappearing in our prayers through the whole liturgical year.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1987.

³⁸⁰ *Terrena despiciere et amare caelestia*. Examples: the collects of the Mass of St. Peter Damien, of St. Francis of Assisi, of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, of St. Sylvester; the secret of the Mass of the 3rd Sunday after Easter; the postcommunions of the Mass of the 2nd Sunday of Advent and of the Sacred Heart.

³⁸¹ Sermon, Ecône, June 9, 1984.

4. Why detachment?

Why do we have to detach ourselves from the goods of this world? Are the things of this world really to be despised?³⁸²

Things are not worthy of disdain in themselves, but they are for us the occasion of sin. It is because riches and pleasures make us fall into sin that we have to be detached from them. Unfortunately, all of the goods of the earth draw us toward sin, because of the malice which is in us. That is why we need spiritual asceticism.³⁸³

Oh, yes, there are indeed souls who attach themselves to these goods much more than to God. To avoid this, our souls need to be detached from earthly things by a spirit of renouncement, by a spirit of poverty.

That detachment is not reserved to priests and religious; it is the very condition of the Christian life. Christians know that everything they have belongs first to God, and God is going to ask them how they made use of those goods.³⁸⁴

God Himself has asked us to make use of the goods of this world to fulfill our duty of state. So it is obvious that we have to make use of the goods of this world. But the disorder that is inside us because of original sin makes it so we seek those goods in a disordered manner, in an excessive manner, which leads us to turn away from prayer, to turn away from God. For what is prayer if not the raising of our soul toward God? Many people no longer raise their soul toward God because they are entirely taken up by the things of this world. They no longer pray and they do not come to unite themselves to the great prayer of our Lord, which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. They desert the churches because they are caught up in the spirit of the world.³⁸⁵

So, obviously, people who have the spirit of the world are not going to understand. They say to themselves, "God created the world, He put us in this world, and so we are meant to live in it. This world is a good thing and we are allowed to enjoy it, we are allowed to take advantage of it." We have to reply that man himself is unbalanced, disoriented by original sin. The goods of this world draw him toward sin, turn him away from our Lord Jesus

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 25, 1981.

³⁸⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 9, 1984.

³⁸⁵ Sermon, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, February 11, 1990.

Christ: "I have bought a pair of oxen, I have built a house, I have gotten married. I cannot come. I cannot attach myself to You. I do not have the time." (Cf. Lk. 14:18-20)

That is why our Lord asks that we *hate* these goods, which means that we detach ourselves from them. We have to use them to a certain extent, since we have to live in this world. But when we have contacts with our family, with our friends, with our goods, our heart has to be detached and we have to be ready if need be to separate ourselves from them.³⁸⁶

There are good occasions to practice detachment: a lost object that we loved, a letter that never comes, a place we have to leave, detachment from objects, from creatures, but also from "our own ideas."³⁸⁷

4. *Abstinence and sobriety*

Abstinence and sobriety are among the other virtues connected to temperance. St. Thomas says that fasting is the act of abstinence which "bridles the lusts of the flesh" and allows the mind to "arise more freely to the contemplation of heavenly things"; it also satisfies for sins.³⁸⁸ "Whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). "Be sober and watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8), do we say at Compline. And St. Paul gives this advice to Titus: "That elderly men be sober, honorable... That women be not enslaved to much wine... That they may train the younger women to be discreet, chaste, sober... Exhort the younger men, in like manner, to be self-controlled." (Tit. 2:2-6) Those are the different categories of advice: sobriety, purity, chastity.³⁸⁹

5. *Chastity*

After defining this virtue, Archbishop Lefebvre presents effective remedies to overcome temptations and keep from falling.

1. What is chastity?

St. Thomas, following Aristotle, says that etymologically *chastity* comes from *chasten*: reason chastens our desire the way one

³⁸⁶ Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1987.

³⁸⁷ Spiritual conference, Fribourg, November 19, 1970.

³⁸⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 147, a. 1.

³⁸⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 5, 1985, 8th conference.

corrects a child. Chastity regulates the use of pleasure destined for the conservation of the species.³⁹⁰

Our body was given to us to serve God and not to serve ourselves, not for a selfish end, but for an end of charity. What have we done with this body which God gave us? Temptations are numerous in this perverse world, in this world of impurity, in this world in pursuit of carnal goods.³⁹¹

2. Advice for practicing virtue

The Church asks us not only to fight the evil spirits which wander through the world (*Eph.* 6:12), but to wage war against ourselves. St. John says that the world is entirely “*concupiscence of the flesh, and concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life*” (1 *John* 2:16). So the Church asks us to wage war against ourselves, against anything in us that is contrary to God.³⁹²

We can easily connect the practice of the virtue of poverty with that of chastity, for they mutually support each other. Without that mortification of detachment from the goods of this world, chastity is not made any easier. Vanity or negligence in dress are contrary to both chastity and poverty. The lack of modesty, the lack of respect for oneself and for one’s neighbor, are likewise contrary to self-mastery, contrary to the order willed by God. Vulgarity in dress, in language, in leisure, in reading, in music, reveals a lack of interior discipline, a lack of restraint that leads to incontinence, to excess in food or drink, and also to sins of lust.

Vigilance, self-mastery go hand in hand with habitual self-denial and make possible a true simplicity, a great charity.³⁹³

The virtue of purity is supposedly no longer possible in our time. It is no longer possible because people no longer take the means, it is as simple as that. The gifts of God are the same as they were a century ago, as ten centuries ago, as fifteen centuries ago. But many no longer want them, no longer take advantage of them. So they complain that they do not have the strength: “In our time, in our time...” But let them take the means that God has given

³⁹⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 151, a. 1. Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

³⁹¹ Sermon, Ecône June 9, 1984.

³⁹² Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

³⁹³ Letter to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 1965, in *Lettres Pastorales et Ecrits*, p. 227.

them! They will find them just as effective. That is something very important for us to bear in mind: prayer in families, the sacrament of penance, the reception of Holy Communion.³⁹⁴

Jesus tells us what we have to do: *“Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation”* (Mt. 26:41).

Watch in order to keep away temptation, watch in order to flee occasions of sin. If we let ourselves be drawn into occasions of sin, how can we not fall? We have to flee the occasions of sin. Pray, do penance – again, it is the Gospel that says it.³⁹⁵

The evil all around us must not penetrate our hearts. We have to do everything we can so as not to give in to temptations. So we also have to practice what they call the custody of our senses, particularly of our eyes and of our ears, to keep evil from entering us.³⁹⁶

To reach perfection demands a great mortification, not only exterior but especially interior. Our Lord teaches us the mortification of the first movements of concupiscence, down to evil glances, evil desires: *“If thy right eye is an occasion of sin to thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. And if thy right hand is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off; for it is better for thee to that one of thy members should be lost than that thy whole body should go to hell.”* (Mt. 5:29-30)³⁹⁷

We can list a few more thoughts to help us in our conduct: the spirit of faith and the devotion to the most Blessed Virgin Mary. And then, let us remember the simple rule, *“Resist the beginnings,”* where there is occasion of sin. Finally, if we do fall, maintain our calm and our humility, open simplicity in confession. Along with that, let us have a great confidence in God and the spirit of compunction.³⁹⁸

6. *Virginité*

1. What is virginity?

Virginity is the voluntary and perpetual renunciation of pleasure destined for the conservation of the species, and what

³⁹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, April 6, 1980; cf. *the Mass of All Time*, p. 162.

³⁹⁵ For example: *“They must always pray and not lose heart”* (Lk. 18:1). *“Unless you repent, you will all perish”* (Lk. 13:3). Sermon, Ecône, June 9, 1984.

³⁹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, April 20, 1975.

³⁹⁷ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 21, 1978, 9th conference.

³⁹⁸ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

makes that renunciation praiseworthy is its goal: the freedom to be entirely for God. Virginity is beyond all doubt more excellent than marriage.³⁹⁹ It is the means of the contemplative life, which procures the good of the soul by meditating on the things of God.⁴⁰⁰

2. Praise of virginity

St. Thomas considers the question of whether virginity is lawful.⁴⁰¹ There are duties which are incumbent upon an individual, and which cannot be omitted without sin. But there are others which are incumbent on society and are not binding upon every individual.

“Sufficient provision is made for the human multitude, if some found a family, while others abstaining from this betake themselves to the contemplation of Divine things, for the beauty and welfare of the whole human race.”⁴⁰² That is why St. Paul, St. Peter, after our Lord, recommend virginity, and call married people to chastity in marriage, in other words, to avoid whatever is contrary to the law of marriage: fornication, adultery, and so on (*Heb.* 13:4). “*For God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness*” (1 *Thess.* 4:7).

Because virginity is spiritualizing, how intensely it helps in contemplation, and how apostolic it is, since contemplation is a source of apostolate! It says in the office of St. John, “Resting on the breast of the Lord, he drew the living waters of the Gospel at the sacred source of the heart of the Lord, and he spread the grace of the Word of God over all the earth.”⁴⁰³

5. THE SUBLIMITY OF THE EVANGELICAL VIRTUES

To close these considerations on the virtues, here is a passage from Archbishop Lefebvre, former missionary, recalling testimonies which he had received long before from the lips of pagans who could not help but recognize the divine origin of the Christian virtues.

³⁹⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 152, a. 4.

⁴⁰⁰ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁴⁰¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 152, a. 2.

⁴⁰² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 152, a. 2, *ad* 1.

⁴⁰³ 8th response of Matins of the feast of St. John. Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

The Evangelical virtues, the supernatural virtues practiced by the breath of the Holy Spirit, are the beauty, the greatness, the sublimity, the sanctity of the Church, and they throw into admiration those who have no preconceived bias, sometimes even pagans who are discovering all of these works of charity for the first time. "Ah! Only God could do such a thing," is what I heard myself with my own ears, in the missions, from simple people.⁴⁰⁴

4.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

For every virtue our Lord provides us with a gift of the Holy Ghost. We need these gifts.⁴⁰⁵ They are not reserved to souls who have visions, who have extraordinary graces. Every good Christian has the gifts of the Holy Ghost in him. To develop his virtues, he has to use these gifts. We need them in the daily practice of our virtues.⁴⁰⁶

Why do we need the gifts of the Holy Ghost? The virtues are habits to act well which we have in us, just as vices are habits to act badly. Well, it is not enough to have those virtues; we also have to practice them at the exact moment we need them. So when we have to practice the virtue of temperance for example, or of justice, or of prudence, we need a particular inspiration of the Holy Spirit to know exactly what ought to be done.⁴⁰⁷

1. WHAT ARE THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST?

The gifts of the Holy Ghost are supernatural qualities which God gives us to make us more pliable to the operation of the Holy

⁴⁰⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 7th conference.

⁴⁰⁵ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 68, a. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴⁰⁷ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 68, a. 2, *ad* 1 and *ad* 2. Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

Spirit.⁴⁰⁸ The gifts place us in a particular aptitude to receive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. They are like antennae which in a way pick up the signal of what the Holy Spirit wants to make us do and which fortify our virtues.⁴⁰⁹

To accomplish such and such an act of virtue without outside help, we need a certain time to judge what we ought to do. But thanks to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, there is a light and at the same time an impulsion which are given to us to act in a virtuous way, rapidly and effectively. That is the normal channel by which the Holy Spirit leads souls when they are docile to His inspirations.⁴¹⁰

As he describes the specificity of each gift, Archbishop Lefebvre shows to what virtue it corresponds. In fact, each one of the first four perfects one of the cardinal virtues and each of the last three strengthens one of the theological virtues.

2. THE GIFT OF FEAR

The gift of fear of the Lord perfects the virtue of temperance.⁴¹¹

We are not talking about servile fear, which is incompatible with heavenly beatitude whereas the gifts endure, but about filial fear,⁴¹² because filial fear reveres God and makes us flee the bad action that offends Him, and consequently it stifles and constrains the petulance of the passions, especially carnal passions.⁴¹³

You see with what fear and what respect Moses drew near to God on Mount Sinai. Far from his people, he prostrated himself before that ardent flame which was the symbol of God and which signified His presence (*Ex.* 24:17). Well, that is the mystery for which we were created. We are meant to live it here below.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 68, a. 3.

⁴⁰⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴¹⁰ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

⁴¹¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴¹² *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 19, a. 9.

⁴¹³ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁴¹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, March 30, 1974.

The nearer we draw to God, the more we tremble. "The angels tremble, the archangels shudder," says the preface of the Mass.⁴¹⁵ The more we teach a soul about the grandeur and the perfection of God, the more that soul acquires a longing to love and to serve God, and the more it is touched by fear: it realizes more and more that to go against the will of God is something terrible.⁴¹⁶

The fear of sin has to turn into the fear of being a cause of the Passion of our Lord. We have to be so afraid of causing pain to our Lord, so afraid of turning away from Him and being separated from Him, that we avoid sin at all cost, not only mortal sin but venial sin as well. We say it in the beautiful prayer that comes just before Communion, "Do not allow me ever to be separated from You."⁴¹⁷

3. THE GIFT OF PIETY

The gift of piety comes into play especially in the relation of man with God, but it extends to his relations with his neighbor. It is this last aspect which Archbishop Lefebvre develops here.

St. Thomas says that the gift of piety, like the other gifts, is a habitual disposition of the soul which makes it quick to act under the influence of the Holy Spirit. By the gift of piety, the Holy Spirit pushes us to have a filial love for God. Piety toward God invites us to render homage to all men insofar as they are related to God.⁴¹⁸

The gift of piety is going to perfect justice, which makes us practice our duties toward God and toward our parents and our neighbor. Piety helps us to submit to God and to our superiors, and to be respectful toward our neighbor. That piety is an interior disposition which facilitates for us the practice of obedience, which facilitates respect for authority and for our neighbor. That is filial piety. For example, a child who has a great deal of filial piety

⁴¹⁵ *Tremunt potestates.*

⁴¹⁶ Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, 1989; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 82.

⁴¹⁷ Ordination retreat, Flavigny, June 1979.

⁴¹⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 121, a. 1. Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

loves his parents in a way which truly manifests in him a particular sense of reverence toward them.⁴¹⁹

The gift of piety is made of respect, of common understanding with those among whom we find ourselves. This attitude is what makes Christian life pleasant. Piety is the flower of Christian civilization. Where this grace of the Holy Spirit 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.⁴²⁰

Let us ask God for this gift of piety, which puts us in our true place before God and before our neighbor, by giving to God all glory, all honor, all adoration, and to our neighbor all the respect and all the charity which we owe him.⁴²¹

4. THE GIFT OF FORTITUDE

The gift of fortitude is a docility to the motion of the Holy Spirit, which gives the confidence to overcome all dangers and which gives the courage to accomplish and persevere in particularly difficult works.⁴²² The virtue of fortitude proceeds according to the limited mode of man, in dependence on divine help yet nonetheless received and limited according to this human mode. The gift of fortitude is so clothed in the strength from above that it makes its own the power of God, so to speak, and passing beyond all natural infirmity, it operates solely by the virtue of God Himself.⁴²³

Supernatural fortitude finds perfect and extraordinary expression in martyrdom. If those who were martyred had only possessed natural strength, they would not have been capable of mar-

⁴¹⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴²⁰ Sermon, Ecône, May 28, 1987; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 257.

⁴²¹ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁴²² Cf. Fr. Adolphe Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life. A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology (Précis de Théologie Ascétique et Mystique, 1924)*, translated by Herman Branderis, S.S., Desclée de Brouwer, Tournai, 1930, pp. 621-622.

⁴²³ Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

tyrdom. What they suffered for the faith was beyond what man is capable of suffering, left to his natural strength alone. But because they had faith in God, our Lord gave them the grace, to the point that many stepped forward and offered themselves for martyrdom with an extraordinary courage that dumbfounded those around them, to the point that many were even converted then and there at the sight of such incredible strength. Those martyrs were sometimes children, weak people, people without culture. They were not scholars, people capable of high reasoning, but by their faith they were capable of holding strong before their torturers, capable of enduring the torments which they were made to undergo. That is where we really see in action the supernatural virtue of fortitude, when it is perfected by the gift of fortitude.⁴²⁴

You are not struggling against material elements, you are struggling against those spirits which are everywhere in the world (*Eph. 6:12*), evil spirits which are striving against the Church, against God. You are going to enter that combat.⁴²⁵

And because you are entering that combat, you have a special need for the gift of fortitude. In fact, you will need that spiritual strength, that supernatural strength, in order to keep yourself in this combat which is more real now than ever. If there has ever been an age when we have had to do battle, it is this one. Satan is unchained, sin is everywhere and final, definitive death for many men who do not believe, who do not wish to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. So prepare yourselves for battle.⁴²⁶

5. THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

The gift of counsel perfects the exercise of the virtue of prudence, which is the virtue of the pilgrim, of one who is going forward, of one who constantly has choices to make. We have to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to choose what is just, what is in conformity with His will, whence the importance of the gift of counsel.⁴²⁷

God helps us by the gift of counsel in particular. Human rea-

⁴²⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴²⁵ Sermon, May 21, 1983.

⁴²⁶ Sermon, Ecône, April 8, 1984.

⁴²⁷ Sermon, Ecône, May 30, 1971.

son is unable to grasp the complexity of all the actions which he is called upon to perform, such that “*the thoughts of mortal men are fearful, and our counsels uncertain.*” Hence in the research of counsel, man requires to be directed by God, who comprehends all things: and this is done by the gift of counsel, whereby man is directed as though counseled by God.”⁴²⁸

In order to practice the virtue of prudence, we need to know what has to be done in certain very grave circumstances. In times of persecution, there really are moments of anguish. What decision should I make? That is where we call upon the gift of counsel: “Holy Spirit, help me.” That is why we invoke the Holy Spirit often in difficult cases, and even at every moment. We ask Him to come to our assistance with His gifts, but especially the gift of counsel.

For example, we will be inspired by the supernatural virtue of prudence to do things which perhaps we would not have done if we had only had the natural virtue. But animated by that desire to serve God in a much more perfect manner than by the natural virtue alone, we are capable of those things. For example, a vocation is incomprehensible, humanly speaking, but from a supernatural viewpoint, we understand that our Lord inspires certain souls to give themselves to Him totally, to offer their life for Him. Since He has done so much for men, it is also very just that certain people devote themselves totally to Him, to serve Him, sacrificing projects that they could have accomplished with their natural gifts.⁴²⁹

6. THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

Hope is perfected by the gift of knowledge. By that gift, God makes us see His presence in everything around us, and consequently makes us hope to see Him one day. By this gift, we think of God naturally, as it were, instinctively, through the beautiful things of nature which surround us.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 52, a. 1, ad 1. Spiritual conferences, Mortain, photocopied collection, 1945-1947.

⁴²⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴³⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 9, a. 2, ad 3. Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference

This gift makes us realize that everything comes back to God. Thus, it makes us see God through creatures, and consequently it helps us to conduct ourselves and to continue always in the direction of Heaven.⁴³¹

It likewise leads us to turn toward God when we see evil things around us. We tell ourselves interiorly, "Poor people who do not know our Lord, who do not live according to His law, who are in sin..." Thus, everything we see, what we hear, what we read makes us think of God. That is the gift of knowledge making us think that way.⁴³²

7. THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

The gift of understanding perfects the virtue of faith.⁴³³ By the virtue of faith, we believe what God has taught us, but the gift of understanding teaches us to see all things in the way God sees them.

Ah, if we truly had that gift of understanding! We ought to wish to see everything here below, to see what we are, to see what we should do, in the way God sees it.⁴³⁴

The word *understanding*, *intellectus*, etymologically *intus legere*, means to read inside of things. The gift of understanding is what makes us see God, insofar as we are able. We do not have the beatific vision, of course, but we have to try to comprehend better the things of God. By the gift of understanding, the Holy Spirit helps us to comprehend them better and consequently to act more as children of God.⁴³⁵

A man who turns away from the world, from material cares, from cares of the body is going to see God more readily, contemplate Him more easily. The saints showed us this by the example of their life. They came near to God, they saw Him to a certain degree because they were detached from the world.

⁴³¹ Sermon, Ecône, May 30, 1971.

⁴³² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴³³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 8, a. 1-3.

⁴³⁴ Sermon, Ecône, May 30, 1971.

⁴³⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

On the contrary, carnal souls, those who love the world, cannot see God. They cannot understand Him. The Gospel says it. Our Lord Jesus Christ says it Himself (*Jn.* 15:19-21), as well as St. John in his first Epistle (1 *John* 3:1). No, he who is of the world cannot understand God; he does not have God in him. And you, by the Holy Spirit, have God in you and will have Him more abundantly.⁴³⁶

We therefore have to seek not only faith but the spirit of faith. It is not the same thing. Unfortunately, one may have 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. Ultimately, this spirit of faith is none other than the gift of understanding. This gift truly gives us the *sense* of our Lord and of the Church.⁴³⁷

8. THE GIFT OF WISDOM

Charity is perfected by the gift of wisdom. Wisdom makes us not so much see God as taste God, savor Him; it is even better than the gifts of understanding and knowledge. There is a certain sweetness in the love of God, a sweetness that lets us taste Him. God is so good, so gentle, so worthy of love that we feel in ourselves a sweetness at His contact. *Sapientia* comes from the word *sapere* which means to taste, to savor. Already, we have a little taste of heavenly happiness by the gift of wisdom.⁴³⁸

If we ask St. Thomas what he thinks of the gift of wisdom which we receive by the grace of the Holy Spirit, he will tell us that it is a participation in divine wisdom. He defines it in a few words of an extraordinary concision and at the same time an incredible penetration: "He who knows the cause that is simply the highest, which is God, is said to be wise simply, because he is able to judge and set in order all things according to divine rules."⁴³⁹ To judge and to set in order are the essential acts of wisdom. Wis-

⁴³⁶ Sermon, Ecône June 2, 1979.

⁴³⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 18, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 247-248.

⁴³⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

⁴³⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 45, a. 1.

dom is therefore not only an act of our speculative intellect (to judge), but also an act of our practical intellect (to set in order). Consequently, it dominates our entire soul, in a way. And it does so not by human reasoning, but by divine rules. Thus, one who truly lives of the gift of wisdom lives according to divine rules, according to eternal rules. He is already a little bit in eternity, he finds himself in a way at the summit of that divine wisdom, in union with God, with our Lord, and he is able to judge. As St. Paul says, “*the spiritual man judges all things*” (1 Cor. 2:15), because he is united to God, and he judges all things with respect to God. So we have to seek after that wisdom which God willed from all eternity to communicate to us.⁴⁴⁰

St. Thomas says that wisdom consists in seeing things according to eternal causes.⁴⁴¹ If we consider our spiritual life according to God’s eternal reasons, I am not saying that we would pass our days in fear and trembling, but we would be in that attitude of which the Lord often speaks to us: “*Be watchful, be watchful, be watchful.*”⁴⁴² Do not slumber. The end is approaching. And that end leads you to an eternity of happiness or misery. Therefore, take care.⁴⁴³

Wisdom seeks to put in order. Therefore charity, perfected by the gift of wisdom, seeks to put in order: order in us, since we are supposed to love ourselves, and order in our neighbor. It is not always simple, it is not always easy, but with the grace of God, we should get there.

“The result is that all is in order both within and without” for that soul filled with the gift of wisdom. “One sees everything, one’s feelings, affections, actions and all that surround one in the state of justified beings belonging to God’s ‘all,’ who have no worth or price save in the measure in which they reflect this infinite. And so, within us the complete tranquility of order reigns.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ Priests’ retreat, Ecône, September 1982, 2nd conference.

⁴⁴¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 45, a. 1.

⁴⁴² *Vigilate, vigilate, vigilate.*

⁴⁴³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

⁴⁴⁴ Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., *The Holy Spirit in the Christian Life (Le Saint-Esprit dans la Vie Chrétienne)*, 1935), B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, MO, 1954, pp. 143-144. Priests’ retreat, Ecône, September 4, 1985, 6th conference.

9. THE MARVELS WORKED BY THE GIFTS

Just as the Holy Spirit was given to the Apostles on Pentecost, we, too, had our Pentecost on the day of our baptism. Ever since then, to the degree that we remained united to God by sanctifying grace, the gifts of the Holy Ghost have been able to produce fruits in us. Obviously we are not fully aware of all of these marvels which God operates in us, but insofar as we are able, it is good to remind ourselves of them to thank Him for them and strive to be worthy to receive ever more of His graces, by being docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴⁵

5.

THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The fruits of the Holy Spirit refer to virtuous acts which have reached a certain perfection and in which man takes delight.

1. The teaching of St. Paul

Beyond the gifts of the Holy Ghost, our spiritual organism has also received from God what spiritual authors call the fruits of the Holy Ghost and the beatitudes.

St. Paul himself has listed the fruits of the Holy Ghost in his Epistle to the Galatians, in chapter 5: *“But I say: Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the words of the flesh are manifest, which are immorality, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, jealousies, anger, quarrels, factions, parties, envies, murders, drunkenness, carousing, and suchlike. And concerning these I warn you, as I have warned you, that they who do such things will not attain the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, modesty, continency.*

⁴⁴⁵ Retreat for religious, Brignoles, July 27, 1984, 10th conference.

Against such things there is no law. And they who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk.” (Gal. 5:16-25)

It is no longer a question here of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but already of the result of our union with our Lord and with His Holy Spirit. We say “fruits of the Holy Ghost” because we are already harvesting their effect in us. The fruits already allow an enjoyment.⁴⁴⁶ They put us in a state of serenity, of goodness, of sweetness, so that we are already drawing real joy from the graces that God gives us by sanctifying grace, by the virtues and by the gifts.⁴⁴⁷

“We judge the tree by its fruits” (cf. Mt. 12:33). We can judge the Holy Spirit whom the Apostles and the disciples received, by the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

What are those fruits? St. Paul lists them. They are twelve in number.⁴⁴⁸ We can unite them in three groups.

The first group includes charity, joy and peace. It is already Heaven! What more will there be in Heaven? Charity will unite us to God for all eternity. It will produce in our hearts an ineffable joy and an immortal peace. So the fruits which the disciples tasted at the descent of the Holy Spirit are already a participation in eternity. They are an extraordinary contact with God, a contact superior to everything they had had up to then. They realized that God is everything, that they had received everything from Him and that their whole life should be oriented toward Him. That contact brought them to a total, definitive gift of self. Henceforth nothing would ever be able to detach them from God. But although they came near to God in a mysterious, profound, extraordinary manner, they still remained on earth.

So what are the fruits of the Holy Spirit for our earthly life, for our day-to-day existence, wrestling with difficulties, with trials, doubt, hesitation, anxiety? St. Paul also lists out a second group: patience, longanimity, goodness, benignity, mildness. Those are the fruits of hope. The Apostles had their eyes always on Heaven, always on God, on the eternal happiness which they were now awaiting with profound hope. *“In You, Lord, have I*

⁴⁴⁶ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 70, a. 1.

⁴⁴⁷ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

⁴⁴⁸ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 70, a. 3.

hoped; I will not be confounded" (Ps. 70:1).⁴⁴⁹ That is what they must have said to themselves. From that moment onward, the things of the earth appeared to them in another light. They were no longer attached to them. In difficulties, in sufferings, in anguish, they manifested these dispositions of patience, of gentleness, of longanimity. And is that not the face of gentleness, of goodness, of patience, of long suffering that we find in true Catholics in their trials, in their difficulties, in their daily cares?

But they had not necessarily become saints yet. Temptations still awaited them: the temptation of human pride that does not want to submit to the mysteries which God reveals to us. It is a very hard trial for our intellect, for our reason, a trial of humility. And then there is the pride of the flesh. That flesh is always wanting to rebel against the spirit, wanting to satisfy its disordered desires, its appetite for pleasure, its intemperance. So what are the fruits of the Holy Ghost to overcome those temptations? Against that pride, against that revolt which is always latent in our souls, the fruits of the Holy Ghost are faith and modesty.⁴⁵⁰

Faith and modesty are perfectly united. We have to show modesty in our reason in order to submit ourselves to the faith. We are little minds, we are at the bottom of the scale of spirits. If the angels have submitted themselves to the intelligence of God and to the truth which God teaches them, how could we, poor humans, refuse? We ought to be modest before God who reveals to us His great truths, His great mysteries: mystery of the Trinity, mystery of the Incarnation, of the Redemption, and mysteries which we encounter even in nature, in creation. So our mind has to submit to the truth of God and to the will of God. Those are the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us: faith, modesty.

Finally, along with faith and modesty, continence and chastity complete the last group of fruits of the Holy Ghost. They moderate the disordered desires of the flesh wanting to rebel against the spirit.

⁴⁴⁹ *In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum*, taken as the last line of the *Te Deum*.

⁴⁵⁰ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, faith as a fruit of the Holy Ghost can mean the virtue of faith or else fidelity (*cf. Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 70, a. 3).

You see how St. Paul, in describing the fruits of the Spirit, is giving us a glorious picture of what the Apostles became in the space of a few moments on the day of Pentecost.⁴⁵¹

2. *The fruits of the Holy Ghost in us*

We, too, have been associated in a way with the Apostles who were in the Cenacle, at the moment we were baptized and when we received confirmation, a sacrament which is simply the completion of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit received at baptism. We have truly received the Holy Spirit.

Have we received His fruits? Let us examine ourselves. Are we aware of having God in us? Are we aware of the charity of God toward us, charity which St. Paul describes in his magnificent Epistle to the Ephesians, in which he speaks of the height, the depth, the immensity of the charity of God (*Eph.* 3:18-19)? Do we truly live close to God? Consequently, do we share the peace and the joy of God by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us?

Do we participate also in the fruits which are given to us to walk toward our eternity, in the midst of the difficulties, the temptations, the attractions of sin in this corrupt world? Do we truly live the fruits of the Holy Ghost which are patience, longanimity, goodness, gentleness? It is so good to remind ourselves of these things! Every day, perhaps, we have to practice those virtues. We suffer today in the Church and by the Church. Is our soul in that state of patience, of gentleness, of mildness in the trials permitted by God, even from our brothers? Or else are we in a certain rebellion? Do we resist the will of God?

And then, do we truly live and breathe that humility of the intellect, day by day? "*Bring every mind to the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (*cf.* 2 *Cor.* 10:5), that is the motto which St. Paul gives us. It is a question of submitting our intellect instead of letting it rebel against the will of God; submitting that Reason which was adored by the French Revolution. Against the faith which asks reason to bend the knee and obey and accept Revelation and the commandments of God, man rises up in his pride and adores his own reason.

⁴⁵¹ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1986.

Finally, are we doing what we can so that the fruits of the Holy Ghost will help us to moderate the desires of our flesh, which also want to revolt, which also would prefer not to obey the commandments of God? Do the gifts of the Holy Ghost act in us so that we practice the virtue of temperance?

Let us ask for all of these fruits of the Holy Ghost, so that from now on we might live truly as Catholics.⁴⁵²

2. THE BEATITUDES

The beatitudes are acts of the present life which, because of their particular perfection, lead directly and surely to the happiness of Heaven and already give a foretaste here below.

1. *The crowning of the divine work*

At the summit of the spiritual life, therefore above acts of ordinary virtue, above the fruits of the Holy Ghost, there are the beatitudes. They are the crowning of the divine work in us, the last, the most sublime effect of the presence of Him whom the Father deigned to send us for our sanctification, the foretaste of heavenly happiness.

The Lord taught us the beatitudes in that famous Sermon on the Mount which opens the period of His public life. He says, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth. Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" (Mt. 5:3-5)

Eight times in a row, He repeats with some variation the same expression *blessed*, proclaiming before the astonished world what Christian language has named the eight beatitudes.⁴⁵³

2. *The law of the Christian*

1. Change the inside

We have to re-read often the Sermon on the Mount, which is our law, which is the law of Christians, which is the law of those who have been baptized in our Lord Jesus Christ and who are

⁴⁵² Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1986.

⁴⁵³ Retreat, le Barroux, August 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p.100.

supposed to be other Christs, who are supposed to resemble our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord is very demanding for us: *"You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Mt. 5:48). That is what our Lord asks of us. He summarizes the entire law in those words. And in what does perfection consist? He explains it to us. We have to change ourselves inwardly and not just our outward appearance. The old law was basically a law of material, external obligation: give alms, and do so even in public; pray in public; observe strictly the commandments of God. It did not ask for more. Our Lord is asking us for much more.

When He tells us, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit"* (Mt. 5:3), our Lord is asking us to have the spirit of poverty, of detachment from the goods of this world. When He says, *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth; blessed the peacemakers"* (Mt. 5:4, 9), our Lord is asking us to be peacemakers, gentle, poor.⁴⁵⁴

"Blessed are they who weep" – this seems incredible – *"for they shall be comforted!"* (Mt. 5:5) Why must we weep? We have to weep because of sin. In the face of moral misery, in the face of those who turn away from God, our heart should bleed. Blessed are we if we weep likewise over our own sins, our own miseries, which are as many obstacles which prevent us from being truly united to God!⁴⁵⁵

2. Seek after holiness

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice!" (Mt. 5:6) This one beatitude I think is crucial, essential. What does it mean? Justice, in the scriptural sense, is sanctity, holiness. Blessed they who hunger and thirst for sanctity! We therefore need to have a profound, constant, interior zeal, manifesting our love of God and of neighbor.

And even if we are persecuted, if we are pursued by those who want to destroy us on account of the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us not only endure those sufferings, but thank God for them, be happy for them, *beati*. Our Lord really is asking for that much. It is the code of holiness of the Catholic. So if we want to follow those who practiced that justice, that sanctity, before us, let

⁴⁵⁴ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1977.

⁴⁵⁵ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

us step onto the road they took, let us walk courageously in their path, in the footsteps of those who are in Heaven, who are now in glory and in joy.⁴⁵⁶

3. Show mercy

“Happy are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy! Happy are the clean of heart, for they shall see God!” (Mt. 5:7-8) Happy therefore those whose heart is not attached in a disordered manner to the things of this world, and who are free to attach themselves to God! God knows how contrary all that is to the spirit of the world. The world is attached to its pleasures, to everything it owns.

“Happy those who suffer persecution for justice’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven! Happy are you when men reproach you, and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for My sake. Rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in Heaven.” (Mt. 5:10-12)⁴⁵⁷

4. Remain united to God in suffering

A person who lives in the greatest poverty or who suffers persecution for our Lord should rejoice and not rebel and say, “Why do I have to suffer like this when I am trying so hard to serve God and do His will?” In reality, when God allows a soul to suffer, it’s because He wants a greater union with that soul. When we are going through suffering, through poverty, through persecution, God is present. He is taking care of us to make us grow, to make us increase in holiness, to detach us from ourselves and attach us more to Him. That is what holy souls understood, so entirely that their life became an illustration of true supernatural life, of life with God and with the Holy Spirit, with the Holy Trinity.⁴⁵⁸

Those things are not at all in agreement with what the world seeks after. The world does not like suffering, does not like to be despised. So let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary to help us to walk according to this code of perfection which our Lord Jesus Christ preached on the mountain.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1977.

⁴⁵⁷ Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1977.

5. Imitate Jesus Christ

We also need to re-read all of the commandments which our Lord gave along with the beatitudes. After our Lord speaks of the beatitudes, He describes at length all of the interior sentiments which we ought to have, and He draws a contrast between the Old and the New Testaments. He says, “*You said before to do like this, but now I am telling you...*” (Cf. Mt. 5:21-48) “*You were told that it was an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. And now I am telling you, do good to those who hurt who.*” (Cf. Mt. 5:38, 44) “*If anyone would go to law with thee and take thy tunic, let him take thy cloak as well; and whoever forces thee to go for one mile, go with him two.*” (Mt. 5:40-41) That spirit of charity, of generosity, of detachment was simply not present in the Old Testament. Our Lord is much more demanding. So, all of the counsels and commandments which He gives during this Sermon on the Mount are very precious for us. They show us the spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we need to have.⁴⁶⁰

3. *The beatitudes sung and lived by Mary*

The *Magnificat* is the Gospel of Mary. In the first four verses, she thanks God that she has received the Holy Spirit and that she has become the Mother of Jesus. In the verses which follow, she already expresses to us certain beatitudes which will be described by our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount: Blessed the poor, blessed the humble, the *humiles*, blessed they who fear God, the *timentes*, blessed they who hunger, the *esurientes* (Lk. 1:50, 52-53). Our Lord will say: “*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice*” (Mt. 5:6), that is to say for holiness: *beati qui esurient*; the Virgin Mary employs the same expression that our Lord was going to use later.

On the contrary, woe to those who are prideful, to those who are all filled with themselves, to those who trust in their wealth, in their power! The Virgin Mary is warning the *potentes*, the powerful, the *divites*, the rich, the *superbi*, the prideful (Lk. 1:51-53).

And then, in the last two verses, she prophesies in a way: “*He has given help to Israel, His servant*” (Lk. 1:54).⁴⁶¹ Mary can already

⁴⁶⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 7th conference.

⁴⁶¹ *Suscepit Israel puerum suum.*

see the foundation of the Church, the Israel of the New Testament, in which she will participate very effectively by being the channel through which the Holy Spirit is given to the Apostles at Pentecost.

And not only does Mary describe her Gospel for us in her *Magnificat*, but then she goes on to live it. So she does not settle merely for speaking of the humble, of those who are poor, of those who fear God, but she is a shining example of these qualities throughout her life. The stable of Bethlehem is the expression of the beatitude of poverty.⁴⁶²

4. *The beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Ghost*

St. Thomas connects every beatitude in the Gospel with a gift of the Holy Ghost, according as that beatitude manifests the most excellent mode of activity of the gift, bringing its reward along with it. Thus the beatitude of the peacemakers, “*blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God*” (Mt. 5:9), corresponds to the gift of wisdom.⁴⁶³

To the gift of wisdom corresponds the beatitude of the peacemakers. The reason is very simple. Is it not the practical work of wisdom to put in order, following on its contemplative exercise? But are they not one and the same thing, to put in order and to bring peace, if it is true to say with St. Augustine that “*peace is the tranquility of order*”?⁴⁶⁴

If we wish to be blessed and consequently if we wish to have peace in our souls, we have to strive to attach ourselves to the only thing worth striving for, that is, to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ, to the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴⁶⁵

5. *The beatitudes and the cross of Jesus*

Let us look at the eight beatitudes, let us try to apply them to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, to our Lord Jesus Christ crucified, and we will see how marvelously they apply.

⁴⁶² Sermon, May 14, 1989.

⁴⁶³ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 45, a. 6.

⁴⁶⁴ *Tranquillitas ordinis*. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, bk. 19, ch. 13; cf. Random House, NY, 1993, pp. 690-691. Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 4, 1985, 6th conference.

⁴⁶⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 13, 1981.

- Poverty, the spirit of poverty. If there is a place where our Lord is poor, where He manifests His poverty, it is certainly on the cross. What does He have left? Even His mother He has given to St. John. His disciples have abandoned Him. It is truly a total self-abandon: *"Into Thy hands I commend My spirit"* (Lk. 23:46). He practices that spirit of poverty in an extraordinary manner.

- Meekness. Our Lord is the Lamb, the Pascal Lamb who is immolated. He is meek as a lamb: *"Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart"* (Mt. 11:29). He was immolated like the lamb which lets itself be taken, although He had everything He needed to resist, since He said, *"If I wished, I could summon legions of angels"* (cf. Mt. 26:53). No, not at all: He truly gave Himself over to His executioners, like a lamb.

- Tears. Our Lord wept tears of blood. What more can we ask? *"Blessed are they who weep"* (Mt. 5:5).

- Hunger and thirst for justice. What else but the cross can eliminate injustice and reestablish justice? To reestablish justice toward His Father and reestablish love of neighbor is perhaps the principal object of our Lord's desire in ascending the cross.

- Mercy. Where do we find our Lord more merciful than on the cross? His merciful heart longs to save souls, and what more could He have done, in His desire to come to our help to save us?

- Purity of heart. If was there ever a pure heart, it is that of our Lord. His heart is truly turned entirely toward His Father, filled to overflowing with the love which He has for His Father and for all humanity. It is from that pierced heart that all pure hearts would come, who were ever to live. His heart purifies souls. It would be the source of all virginities, of all chastities.

- The love of peace. But what is our Lord doing on the cross except reestablishing peace? Our Lord came to appease the anger of God and reestablish peace.

- Persecutions suffered in the cause of God. What is He on the cross if not persecuted for the cause of God?

We see the beatitudes fulfilled on the cross in a manner that could not be more perfect.

So, if we ourselves want to practice truly the beatitudes which are the final consequences of the presence of the Holy Spirit

in souls and which prepare souls for Heaven, then let us participate in the cross of Jesus.

Let us not shrink before difficulties, trials, sufferings of all kinds, great or small. It is the lot of all men. As the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*⁴⁶⁶ says so well, everyone has sufferings, but there is a great difference between those who suffer as Christians, in union with our Lord, to win Heaven, to save souls, to make reparation for their sins, and then those who revolt against suffering. Let us wholeheartedly accept difficulties, trials, contradictions, in union with our Lord, and then joy will fill our heart. The more we practice the beatitudes, the more we will accept all of those crosses after the example of our Lord, and the more we will be happy, the more joy will fill our soul.⁴⁶⁷

Yes, blessed they who suffer! blessed they who hunger and thirst for justice! blessed they who have the spirit of poverty! Those are beatitudes which transform our souls and which put us in a state of orientation toward the blessed life of eternity, for they remind us that we are here as pilgrims and that we need to live in hope.

"In hope were we saved," says St. Paul (*Rom. 8:24*).⁴⁶⁸ Yes, we are saved through hope, if we truly place our hope in God and in the eternal happiness which ought to direct our entire life. So let us ask God to sanctify our souls by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶⁹

3. THE DELICATE ATTENTIONS OF GOD

Here we are at the end of the second book. In order to conserve in our memory the marvels of God toward us, we are going to cast a final look back over the whole of the supernatural goods which He has lavished upon us already here below.

Jesus loves us as His mystical spouse. He loves us and He produces in us abundant fruits, an extraordinary fecundity of supernatural virtues that spring from sanctifying grace. The gifts of the Holy Ghost which are communicated to us come to complete

⁴⁶⁶ *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*, bk I, ch. 12.

⁴⁶⁷ Retreat, le Barroux, August 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 92.

⁴⁶⁸ *Spe salvi facti sumus*.

⁴⁶⁹ Sermon, Ecône, May 22, 1983.

these virtues. Finally, there are the beatitudes. Our soul is thus adorned with precious stones, adorned with virtues which are the admiration of the angels. We have to do everything we can to develop them.⁴⁷⁰

You see how well God has done everything and helps us in an absolutely extraordinary manner at every moment of our day. He is attentive to us much more than we are attentive to Him, unfortunately. If we could realize what God does for us at every instant of our life! He is there, whether it be to incite us to practice a given virtue, or by the gifts of the Holy Ghost or by the sacraments which He gives to us. God is taking care of us all the time. We could be tempted to say that all He has to do in the world is take care of us. If we could see all that God does for us, even for those poor people who do not love Him! Our Lord watches over them and He tries to seize the moment when He might help them to convert. God takes care of everyone, and all the more so, of course, those creatures who submit themselves to Him and give themselves to Him. He is obviously closer to those who give themselves to Him than to those who do not give themselves. That shows with what vigilance God watches over us, loves us and follows us. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the three Persons of the Trinity, are moreover truly in us by divine grace and are not there in an inactive way, but quite the contrary in a very active way, as you can see by all of those virtues, by all of those graces. God gives us actual graces in abundance to help us always to progress. If we only took to heart to render to God everything He does for us, at least as far as we are able, then we could be certain of advancing rapidly in virtue and especially of finding a balance in our spiritual life.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 3, 1979.

⁴⁷¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 8th conference.

Book Three

**THE MEANS THAT
GOD OFFERS US**





THE MEANS THAT GOD OFFERS US

The means to become Christians and disciples of Christ are prayer, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the sacraments, and devotion to the Virgin Mary. Those are the principal means by which God gives us grace and transforms us.¹

I

THE CHURCH

It is through the Church that divine grace is communicated to men. Archbishop Lefebvre bore this always in mind, as we see by the many references to the Mystical Body throughout the present volume. This chapter will now explore that mystery more deeply.

1.

BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE CHURCH

1. THE ORIGIN AND THE END OF THE CHURCH

With the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Church was born in all Her vitality, and at our Lord's command She went on to institute an entire sacramental liturgy for the baptized, made up of prayer, preaching, the Divine Office, the celebration of the mysteries of the cross and of the Eucharist; quickly She multiplied the number of bishops, priests and the other orders, for the increase and the sanctification of believers.

¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 5, 1974.

From the Israel of the Old Testament was born the new Israel of the New Testament, whose head is the Word Incarnate, guiding and forming His people through this desert in order to lead it into the Promised Land, which is none other than the Holy Trinity Itself.²

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

The Church has received from our Lord that magnificent treasure which is none other than His sacrifice, and so His priesthood also, that His sacrifice might be perpetuated and His Spirit be poured into hearts by sanctifying grace: that grace which heals and then raises up our hearts to God. Those are the gifts which our Lord has bestowed on us. Our Lord flooded us with those gifts and entrusted them to His Church in one and the same movement of generosity.⁴

The Church that our Lord willed to found, He willed above all to be priestly; we have no right to change the nature of the Church. He willed that all souls be saved by Him: by His humanity and by His Church, which is like the extension of His humanity across time and space.⁵

2. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

The members of the Church are divided into the Church militant, the Church suffering and the Church triumphant, which signify respectively the Church here below, purgatory and the heavenly homeland. Archbishop Lefebvre offers a rapid presentation of the members of the Mystical Body and then explains why the Church on earth has received the title of militant.

² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 70; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 54.

³ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

⁴ Retreat, le Barroux, August 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 45

⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 1974; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 45.

1. Who are the members of the Church?

The mystery of the Church is truly a marvelous thing brought into being by our Lord. That Church reaches all the way up to Heaven, the Church triumphant; She is suffering in purgatory and She is still militant here below.⁶

St. Thomas⁷ asks himself who are the members of that Mystical Body of which our Lord is the head. His answer is very enlightening: he distinguishes those who are members only in potency from those who are members in act: whether in act definitively – that is, the Church suffering and triumphant, including the angels – or else in act but *in via*, on the road to Heaven by faith and charity; and finally, sinners who have the faith but are dried up members, devoid of charity. The Church considered as Mystical Body is a spiritual reality comprising all of the souls living on the divine life communicated by our Lord, like living branches attached to the vine. Many, those here below, can still cut themselves off from the vine and perish, while others on the contrary may yet be grafted on by a valid and fruitful baptism and then live by its life. However, this Mystical Body, which is invisible to us, takes the form here below of a visible, hierarchical society founded by our Lord and meant to increase the Mystical Body in accordance with the command of our Lord to His Apostles, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). “He who believes shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned” (cf. Mk. 16:16).⁸

2. Members of the Church militant

We are part of the Church militant. Perhaps one day we will be part of the Church suffering, but for the moment we are part of the Church militant.

Why this term *militant*? Because we have to fight. *Militant* comes from the Latin *militare*. We are military; we must do battle. But why this battle? The battle against God started in Heaven with the bad angels. And then Satan drew men into disobedience, as well. They passed over to the devil’s camp. And our Lord brought us into His camp through baptism. So at our baptism we became

⁶ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

⁷ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 8, a. 3 and 4.

⁸ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 69-70; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 53.

soldiers of our Lord. Yes, we have to struggle against the powers of hell and against their every appearance in the world.⁹

2.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

God willed to constitute His Church with the characteristics which we all know and which we affirm in our *Credo*: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Those are marks that can never be lacking to the Church. The Church is now and will always be one, holy, catholic and apostolic.¹⁰

1. THE CHURCH IS ONE

*The catechism of St. Pius X teaches that, "The true Church is called One, because Her children... are united together in the same faith, in the same worship, in the same law; and in participation of the same Sacraments, under the same visible Head, the Roman Pontiff."*¹¹

The Church has to be one because there is only one God, one faith, one baptism. That is what Scripture says (*Eph.* 4:5). The Church possesses that God, that faith and that baptism. She has them forever and She wants to give them to us.¹²

We believe in one God, we believe in one Lord: Jesus Christ, who was born and who suffered, who shed His blood for us. We believe in one Church: *unam, sanctam, catholicam Ecclesiam*. We believe in one baptism. Four times the word *unum* appears in the *Credo*: *unum Deum, unum Dominum Jesum Christum, unam, sanctam, catholicam Ecclesiam, unum baptisma*. Four times, we say "one": one

⁹ Conference to the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, March 3, 1988.

¹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

¹¹ *The Catechism of St. Pius X*, translated by Msgr. John Hagan, Benziger, New York, 1910, art. 9, q. 14.

¹² Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

God, one Lord, one Church, one baptism. What does that mean? It means it is defining one sole religion: there are not two of them, there is only one Catholic religion; there is no other.

If we believe that our Catholic religion is the only religion, then we have to draw the consequences, and the consequences are simple, very simple: all men need to be in that holy religion if they want to be saved. That is why we have to be missionaries.¹³

It is in the service of that Church, who is one, that we have been consecrated in our priesthood. Whatever the cost, we must defend that fundamental truth of our faith. Let us keep fidelity to that faith.¹⁴

If you have kept the faith up until now, give thanks to God and promise to keep it in its perfect, absolute integrity. For it only takes denying a single article of the faith to be no longer Catholic, to be no longer a member of the Church, to be cut off from the Church.¹⁵

2. THE CHURCH IS HOLY

The most powerful mark of the Church, the most effective in attracting souls to our Lord and to His Church, is not unity, although unity is obviously fundamental; it is not catholicity, either, which is adhesion to the faith over all the earth; nor apostolicity, which is the profession of the faith across time; it is holiness. We can say that the mark of the Church which most stands out, to Catholics and pagans alike, is holiness.¹⁶

The fruits of holiness which the Church always bears are a great miracle. We could easily imagine the world with all its scandals dragging every single soul in its wake. Nor does the Church in Herself have any human means on Her side. She has no army, She does not have a powerful political organization. Nonetheless She remains throughout the centuries, in spite of persecutions, in spite of oppositions, in spite of all trials. Still today, how many

¹³ Sermon, Toulouse, June 19, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 46.

¹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, March 27, 1986.

¹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^ae, q. 5, a. 3. Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1987.

¹⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 1st conference.

examples of holiness in the Church! Those fruits of holiness that the Church produces are an on-going miracle. And that is what most touches the heart of infidels and pagans. Holiness really is the strongest argument that can touch hearts. And you have to be absolutely convinced that the same applies for you. You will convert souls by your attitude toward them. It is in manifesting the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Church by your own manner of being that you will do good to souls.¹⁷

So ask God to make you really live up to your vocation, which is a vocation to holiness. God wills that we be holy, that we be like Him: “For I have given you an example, that as I have done, so you also should do” (cf. Jn. 13:15). Our Lord has shown the example of poverty, of obedience, of humility, of modesty, of sacrifice, and of prayer. The world needs those examples. Good Catholics need to have examples, also, that encourage them to practice the same virtues, because it’s obviously not only monks and nuns, not only priests who have to practice the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it’s all good Christians. By their baptism, they, too, are chosen; they, too, are called to live up to that ideal held out by our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸

3. THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

The Catechism of the Council of Trent says, “The third mark of the Church is that she is Catholic; that is, universal. And justly is she called Catholic, because as St. Augustine says, ‘She is diffused by the splendor of one faith from the rising to the setting sun.’”¹⁹

We have to love going back to that remarkable passage in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians (*Eph.* 3:8 ff.) which the liturgy offers us on the feast of the Sacred Heart. The creation of the new human family of Christians truly is a new creation, making ready God’s elect and the predestined: “To as many as received Him, He gave the power of becoming sons of God”²⁰ (*Jn.* 1:12); it is the creation of the

¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 17, 1975.

¹⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 1st conference.

¹⁹ St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, Ps. 23. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 106.

²⁰ *Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri.*

Mystical Body of Jesus, to which we belong by a valid and fruitful baptism. "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"²¹ (Mt. 28:19). That family is the Catholic family, exclusively, because it alone possesses a faith whole and intact in Jesus Christ and in His work, the Church.²²

Surely there are souls who are saved and who are not a part of the visible body of the Church, yet who are part of the soul of the Church and receive graces outside of the Church. But we also have to believe that it does not happen very often. That is why the Church has to be missionary. We would not need to be missionaries if everybody was receiving grace.

So the graces bestowed on those who are not part of the visible body of the Church can only come through the Church. No one can be saved through a false religion. No one can be saved through error, through a path that opposes the Holy Spirit, that opposes the wisdom of God, that opposes the means that God chose to save us, namely, His Incarnation.²³

4. THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

The Church comes from the Apostles, to whom were entrusted the great gift of Revelation.

Our Lord already instituted the Church in part when He named Peter as Her foundation. The Church was also founded in a special way by the water and the blood which flowed from His heart. And then She was founded powerfully and totally on the day of Pentecost. When that day came, the Apostles were already established, and they were ready to carry out the orders which our Lord had given them to offer the sacrifice of the Mass themselves and to create successors that the sacrifice of the Mass might be offered until the end of time. And then finally at Pentecost did they really understand all that our Lord had made of them and done for them. Until then they had not quite really understood. By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they understood. Then their eyes

²¹ *Euntes docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*

²² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 28-29; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 12-13.

²³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 5, 1977.

were opened and they stepped into the divine plan. Not a single moment did they hesitate: they were detached from the goods of this world; they gave themselves body and soul to their apostolate, to the reign of our Lord, even to death, even to the shedding of their blood.²⁴

When Jesus sent the Apostles into the whole world, they could have said, "But that's impossible, there are only twelve of us; and then this pagan world into which our Lord is sending us is entirely corrupt; we will never succeed, there is no point in even trying." Obviously, humanly speaking, they would have been right to say that. Did they say it? Not at all. They had confidence in the word of our Lord, and they converted Europe and the entire Mediterranean world. They went all the way to India; they visited Spain and North Africa. So they reached almost every continent, just those twelve. They did an enormous amount of work, with God of course who made their preaching easier by the miracles they did and by their holiness.²⁵

3.

THE CHURCH: DIVINE AND HUMAN

Archbishop Lefebvre broaches here the topic of the proper attitude to maintain, in the painful crisis which the Church has been undergoing since Vatican II. He invites the faithful not to fall into either of the two contrary temptations, which come from looking only at Her divine nature without taking into account Her human character.

1. DO NOT BE SCANDALIZED

We certainly have to maintain our belief in the infallibility of the Church and of the successor of Peter, but we also have to acknowledge the tragic situation of our Catholic faith, because of

²⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 7th conference.

²⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 6th conference.

the mindset and the documents that are coming down to us from men of the Church.²⁶

The Church is divine; She will always possess the eternal truth. She communicates to us divine realities, and particularly the Holy Eucharist, which will be the glory of our souls in Heaven. Yes, the Church is divine, but She is also human, and much more so than our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Saint, the Just *par excellence*; He could not sin, whereas the Church on the contrary is made up of sinful men. It is true that the pope has a share in the divinity of the Church to a certain degree by the charism of infallibility; yet he is still a man, he is still a sinner. Outside of those cases where he invokes his charism of infallibility, he can err, he can sin.

So why do we take scandal and say like some, "He is not the pope"; as Arius said of our Lord, "He is not God"? We, too, could be tempted to say, "It's not possible, he could never be pope and still do the things he is doing."²⁷

Archbishop Lefebvre rejects the hypothesis of sede-vacantism, that is, the vacancy of the Apostolic See, and he justifies his position based on the words of Pope Pius XII.

Are we supposed to separate ourselves from the Church of Rome and cling directly, so to speak, to our Lord Jesus Christ? Dangerous mistake!

Pius XII says very well that "if at times there appears in the Church something that indicates the weakness of our human nature, it should not be attributed to Her juridical constitution, but rather to that regrettable inclination to evil found in each individual, which its Divine Founder permits even at times in the most exalted members of His Mystical Body, for the purpose of testing the virtue of the Shepherds no less than of the flocks... That is no reason why we should lessen our love for the Church, but rather a reason why we should increase our devotion to Her members."²⁸ These words are prophetic. We need no other explanation to understand the situation we are living through today. Right now, we

²⁶ Sermon, October 13, 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 462. See also the section of the present volume which treats of the virtue of obedience (*The dilemma between faith and obedience and Know how to disobey in order to obey*).

²⁷ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1982.

²⁸ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943, §66.

do not have the happiness of living in peace and in total confidence in the hierarchy. We are caught up in a great disorder, but it is our duty to maintain the most appropriate attitude, so we don't go astray and don't hold in our hearts certain sentiments and orientations that would lead us straight out of the Church.²⁹

2. DO NOT CLOSE YOUR EYES TO REALITY

After rejecting sedevacantism, Archbishop Lefebvre denounces the other temptation, which would be to deny the deviations of the Roman authorities by invoking the divinity of the Church in a false way.

Other people, on the contrary, divinize the Church to such a point that they consider everything in Her to be perfect. So for them it is out of the question to offer any opposition whatsoever to anything that comes from Rome, because they consider that everything in Rome is divine. They are imitating those who said that our Lord was so much God that He could not have suffered. They said that He appeared to suffer but in reality He did not suffer, His blood did not flow.

It is the same thing with certain people today who say, "No, nothing can be human, nothing can be imperfect in the Church." They are wrong, too. They are not looking at reality straight on.

So how far can imperfection really go in the Church, how far can sin really go: sin in the mind, sin in the soul, sin in the heart and the will?

Well, the facts are just going to have to show us. Just as we never would have dared to place those words on the lips of our Lord, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou abandoned Me?*" (Mt. 27:46), so we never would have thought it possible for error to penetrate so far inside the Church.

But we cannot close our eyes to the problem. The realities are right there in front of us and they refuse to be ignored. We are witness to all of the horrible things that are happening in the Church and to everything that has happened since Vatican II; witness to those ruins that are accumulating day by day, year by year.

²⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 7, 1981, from notes taken by a retreatant.

The more time goes by, the more the errors are spreading and the more the faithful are losing the Catholic faith.

A recent poll in France was saying that practically speaking we can suppose that there are no more than two million French Catholics who are still genuinely Catholic.

So if things continue this way, everybody is going to fall into error, into heresy, because, as St. Pius X already said, certain clergy have made their way within the Church and are spreading errors by taking advantage of the posts they occupy.³⁰

3. LET US NOT ABANDON THE CHURCH!

Our seminaries exist today out of love for the Roman Catholic Church. So we have to pray, sacrifice ourselves, remain like Mary at the foot of the cross. We must not abandon our Lord Jesus Christ, even if, as Scripture says, He appears “*like a leper*” (Is. 53:4) on the cross. At that moment, the Virgin Mary held onto the faith and continued to see God behind those wounds, behind that pierced heart.

It is the same for us: amidst all of the wounds inflicted on the Church, in spite of the persecution that we are undergoing even from those who have authority in the Church, let us not abandon the Church.

We will continue the Church by the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the true sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the true sacraments, by the true catechism.³¹

One thing only is necessary for the continuation of the Catholic Church: bishops who are fully Catholic, without the least compromise with error, who found Catholic seminaries where young aspirants may be nourished on the milk of true doctrine, placing

³⁰ St. Pius X, Letter to Cardinals, May 27, 1914: “We are, alas! in a time when men are welcoming and adopting with great facility certain ideas of conciliation of the faith with the modern spirit, ideas which lead farther than one thinks, not only to the weakening but even to the total loss of the faith.... Oh! how many navigators, how many pilots, and – God forbid! – how many captains, confiding in profane novelties and in the deceitful science of the age, have been shipwrecked rather than reach the port!” Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1982.

³¹ *Ibid.*

our Lord Jesus Christ in the center of their minds, of their wills, of their hearts; a lively faith, a profound charity, a boundless devotion will unite them to our Lord; like St. Paul they will ask us to pray for them so that they might advance in the knowledge and the wisdom of the *Mysterium Christi*, where all the divine treasure is to be found.³²

³² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 9; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. ix.

II

PRAYER

In the prayer of the *Pater*, our Lord says that the will of God must be done on earth as in Heaven. And He summarizes the whole Sermon on the Mount by saying, “*You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Mt. 5:48). So God is asking us for a very great perfection. He is very demanding for us. And in calling us to that immense charity, He is also giving us the means to accomplish it. Those means He gives to us primarily through prayer. If we wish to be perfect, we have to pray.³³

1.

PRAYER IN GENERAL

Prayer should occupy a great place in the Christian life. The goal of prayer is to unite man to God. It teaches him to know God better and draws down on him the graces he needs to love God and serve Him.

1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

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 soul toward God makes our soul more detached from itself and

³³ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1976.

from all temporal preoccupation and makes it be entirely for God.³⁴

Prayer is very simply that ascension of our soul toward its Creator and Redeemer; it is something natural to the simple, upright soul. It takes the habit of sin, which is opposed to that elevation of the soul toward God, for prayer to become a pure formality; it takes the pride of the mind, nourished on fables and sophistry, for man to become ashamed to pray.³⁵

2. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

St. Thomas asks himself, “Whether it is becoming to pray?” And he answers, “*We must always pray and not lose heart*” (cf. Lk. 18:1).³⁶

To understand the place of prayer in the economy of salvation, we have to know that God foresees not only the actions He wants us to carry out, but He also determines the causes by which they are to be produced, causes which include our own activity but also our prayers. Nothing escapes Him, obviously, not a single one of our thoughts, not a single one of our acts. All of that enters the Providence of God. Thus, in the body of the article, St. Thomas explains, “We pray, not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers, in other words ‘that by asking, men may deserve to receive what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give.’”³⁷

And in the answer to the objections, the Angelic Doctor specifies, “We need to pray to God, not in order to make known to Him our needs or desires, but that we ourselves may be reminded of the necessity of having recourse to God’s help in these matters. As stated above, our motive in praying is, not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that, by our prayers, we may obtain what God has appointed.” And the holy Doctor continues, “God bestows many things on us out of His liberality, even without our

³⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 226.

³⁵ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 17, 1952; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 33.

³⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 83, a. 2.

³⁷ St. Gregory, *Dialogues*, I, ch. 8.

asking for them: but that He wishes to bestow certain things on us at our asking, is for the sake of our good, namely, that we may acquire confidence in having recourse to God, and that we may recognize in Him the Author of our goods. Hence Chrysostom says, "Think what happiness is granted thee, what honor bestowed on thee, when thou conversest with God in prayer, when thou talkest with Christ, when thou askest what thou wilt, whatever thou desirest."³⁸

That is what the faith teaches us. We must not believe that our prayers can change the will of God, but at the same time, it is good to know that those prayers are perfectly necessary, perfectly useful, because God expects them from us in order to produce the effect which He has foreseen to accomplish from all eternity.³⁹

Before the blindness of minds, before the hardening of hearts, we have a grave duty, a very grave duty: the duty to pray, to join our hands and implore God for the salvation of the world. Circumstances invite us more than ever to raise our souls to God, to revive in our souls the virtues of piety and devotion which the blood of Christ placed in us through baptism.⁴⁰

3. VOCAL PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL PRAYER

1. *Vocal prayer*

Vocal prayer is what we can do just ourselves, like the recitation of the rosary or of various prayers which we can say at home. It can be individual or in community. It moves us to interior devotion. It renders to God His due, because the body takes part, as well. It is normal that the body participate in prayer. Vocal prayer is in a way the overflowing of devotion, with devotion being the interior aspect, vocal prayer being the external aspect. So vocal prayer can and should increase our devotion.⁴¹

The external acts of the virtue of religion, like vocal prayer, are done for the internal acts.

³⁸ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 83, a. 2, *ad* 1-3.

³⁹ Retreat for religious, Brignoles, July 26, 1984, 7th conference.

⁴⁰ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 17, 1952; *cf. Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 32.

⁴¹ *Cf. Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 83, a. 12. Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 4, 1985, 5th conference.

We pray, we recite prayers to express what we are thinking, and to produce in ourselves what we are saying. What matters is the interior religion, contrary to the Pharisees. One of our resolutions should be to live the prayer we are saying. Let us not be mindless in our prayer, daydreamers all the time, automatons.⁴²

2. *Spiritual prayer*

As we go more deeply into the nature of prayer and its repercussions on our existence, human and Christian, we are going to realize that the profound life of the created soul, the redeemed soul, has to be a life of continuous prayer.

Every spirit, whether human or angelic, is ordained toward God by its spiritual nature, by its intelligence and its will, and gratuitously ordained by grace to enter into a participation of the eternal beatitude of the Holy Trinity.

So every spirit is primarily religious, and its religious life finds expression in prayer: vocal, mental, and spiritual.

Vocal prayer, which includes all of liturgical prayer, instituted by God Himself and by God Incarnate and fashioned by the Holy Spirit in the Roman liturgy especially, is the most sublime source and expression of mental prayer and spiritual prayer. To neglect this prayer, to limit it, to make it superficial, would ruin the essential prayer, the spiritual prayer, to which vocal prayer is ordained by the Holy Spirit.⁴³

3. *Attention in Prayer*

St. Thomas asks himself if attention is useful to prayer.⁴⁴ 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

⁴² Notes for a brothers' retreat, Senegal, September 11-17, 1960.

⁴³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 41-42; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 26-27, and *Priestly Holiness*, p. 239.

⁴⁴ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 83, a. 13.

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 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.⁴⁵

While we are saying prayers, like the rosary which we sometimes recite in a little bit of a monotonous way, we may very well have our mind completely turned toward God. A person who prays like that is not thinking of anything but of our Lord, of God, of the holy angels, of Heaven. His prayer is probably more pleasing to God than that of someone who is trying to pay attention to all of the words he is pronouncing. What matters is having our mind turned toward God, toward our Lord, who is the object of prayer.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 240-241.

⁴⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

⁴⁷ Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 241.

2.

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Liturgical prayer is the most excellent homage which can be rendered to God by man on this earth. It prevents the illusions possible in individual inspiration and comes to the help of the soul by suggesting to it the turns of phrase the best adapted to express its sentiments toward God.

1. THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER

The liturgy is the public prayer of the Church. That prayer was confided to the Apostles by our Lord and is handed down to us by the Church. That is why we thank the Church for having given us that beautiful liturgy which She places on the lips of all the Christians in the whole world.⁴⁸

The liturgy, this magnificent liturgy of the Church, which is truly a product of the Holy Ghost, expresses 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 and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Church brings us through different sentiments depending on the various prayers, and they are all helping to unite us to God.⁴⁹

That great action and that prayer which is called the liturgy – made up of the sacrificial action and the Eucharist, and also all of the prayers that either prepare for the sacrifice and the Eucharist or else flow from them, and all of the sacramental actions that dispose us for them or extend them in our lives – all that is the great sacrament, the great source of life, the fountain of living water.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 3rd conference.

⁴⁹ Retreat, St. Joseph Carmel, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 222.

⁵⁰ Letter to Brother Priests, No. 69, Dakar, April 17, 1960; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 106.

2. THE LITURGICAL YEAR

The Church has organized the temporal cycle and the sanctoral cycle to make us participate in the mystery of our Lord over the course of the whole year. The temporal is divided especially into the time of Christmas and the time of Easter, and the sanctoral has us participate in the feasts of saints throughout the year.

“The Ecclesiastical year begins on the first Sunday of Advent and ends on the Saturday following the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost. It is composed of liturgical seasons or times, which together constitute the Proper of the Time.” That is the Temporal. “Its goal is to make us live again the mysteries of Christ, to imbue us with the spirit of the Church and, year by year, to draw us toward God by making us enter more and more profoundly into the practice of our Christian life. From the first Sunday of Advent to the twenty-fourth after Pentecost, the Temporal commands the entire liturgical year... Simultaneously with this cycle unfolds the Proper of the Saints.” The celebration of the mysteries of Christ is meant to “form us in the practice of a life of baptism.”⁵¹

The Christmas cycle begins with the season of Advent and ends on January 13. We could also add the time which follows, namely from January 14 to Septuagesima. After that there is the Easter cycle, which includes the time of Septuagesima until Ash Wednesday; then the times of Lent and the Passion; and finally Eastertide, from Easter to Pentecost, including the octave.

Why has the Church arranged the liturgical cycle in that manner? It is to make us contemplate all of the mysteries of our Lord. Ultimately, it is our *Credo* which is being presented to us over the course of the year and on which we are called to meditate in a very special way.

The proper texts of the Seasons, prayers, prefaces and so on, are so well chosen, so beautiful that they raise us up, allow us to deepen our faith and increase our charity.⁵²

⁵¹ Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, *Missel et Vespéral Romain Quotidien*, Editions de l’Apostolat Liturgique, Bruges, 1961, pp. 13, 14; cf. adaptation and translation, *St. Andrew Daily Missal with Vespers for Sundays and Feasts and Kyriale* (1945), republished by Bonaventure Publications, Great Falls, MT, 1999, pp. v-vii.

⁵² Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 22, 1978, 11th conference.

3. THE LITURGY: SCHOOL OF PRAYER

We need to go to God by the ways of the Church – they are the surest of all – and not by our own personal ways. It is certainly very good that we express our devotion to God with our whole heart and soul in our meditation and in our personal prayers; but we are going to pray all the better the more we come to live and breathe the piety of the Church. Never could we have a piety as great as that of the Church Herself. The Church is the mystical Spouse of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the songs of the Spouse are inimitable. Gregorian Chant all by itself truly lifts us up toward Heaven, lifts us up toward to God.

So let us follow these pathways in order to know God better, to know Him as the Church wants to make us know Him. We can't start thinking that we are better than other people because we are capable of finding new pathways. On the contrary, let us walk in the pathways that the Church has traced out for us, loving with all our heart that great school which is the liturgy of the Church.⁵³

As we meditate the liturgical offices, let us draw special nourishment from the prayers composed by the Church for the proper of the Mass – along with the common, of course. The proper always contains a particular lesson for that feast. And the prayers, so short but so beautiful, give us every time a real subject of meditation. Whether it be the collect, the secret or the postcommunion, we are astounded by their depth and by the truths of our faith which the Church is setting before us.

We really are in awe before all the wealth of the liturgy. Take the introits and the graduals, as well. How many profound and moving things in those graduals, those calls upon the mercy, upon the goodness of God, in praise of God! In these prayers of the Church we can always find one of the four ends of the sacrifice of the Mass: latreutic, eucharistic, propitiatory, or impetratory. And we realize that we can bring all of the texts of the liturgy to one or another of those ends. Sometimes it is adoration that predominates, sometimes thanksgiving, sometimes the presentation of our miseries, of our sins, a call to the mercy of God, and then finally

⁵³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 3rd conference.

asking for graces that we need.⁵⁴

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 only ask us to have contrition, to weep over our sins, to do penance. She does insist on that aspect at certain times, 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 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...*⁵⁵

All that is done with such an art, such a maternal concern on the part of the Church to awaken in our hearts those sentiments toward our Lord, that the liturgy genuinely is a marvel. Dom Guéranger wanted to protect from all deviation that tremendous source of graces that is the liturgy, fundamental source of the life of the Church. Now, alas, the deviations are everywhere. That is why so many of the faithful are dying of suffocation, because no one is giving them these liturgical offices any more. They no longer have the graces to which they have a right and which they need.

You see that the liturgy is always making us pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, with our Lord Jesus Christ, in our Lord Jesus Christ. Never would the Church give us a religion without our Lord. For Her, our Lord is everything, He is Her mystical Spouse. Never does She let Herself forget it. That is why our prayers end every time with these words: *per Christum Dominum nostrum*, through Jesus Christ our Lord. And so we see that we cannot obtain any graces at all outside of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Spiritual conference Ecône, January 16, 1978.

⁵⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 222-223.

⁵⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 16, 1978.

4. THE LITURGY: SOURCE OF VIRTUES

A liturgy that is well done, a Mass that is well celebrated with all of the bows, all of the reverences – all that has a meaning. The Church is not trying to give us some kind of a pleasant theatrical performance. The incensing of the priest and the faithful, the bows, the genuflections, every one of those gestures has a profound significance. But some say, why the incense among people? We incense God, we do not incense men. In reality, we are incensing souls sanctified by grace, because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit. And if we incense authorities with more solemnity, it is because men who hold authority are participating in God's authority.⁵⁷

The liturgy is a school of humility. You see it in the gestures, the inclinations, the genuflections, the great respect we have for God in the liturgy; by the incensing, the profound bows, and the respect we have for others. That ought to be habitual, to think that men have a soul which is made in the image of God and which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It can't be only in the liturgy that we respect the people around us. It needs to penetrate our whole life and help us acquire that humility with regard to other people.⁵⁸

The Church gives birth to souls, She nourishes them, She transforms them in and through Her liturgy. We can say in truth that the liturgy is truly the bosom of the Church where souls find the complete nourishment, the perfect food of their spiritual life, the teaching of the truth, the appreciation of true values and their hierarchy, the apprenticeship of all the virtues.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1975.

⁵⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 28, 1975.

⁵⁹ Letter to All Members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit on the First Session of Vatican Council II, Paris, March 25, 1963; cf. *A Bishop Speaks*, pp. 7-8.

3.

MEDITATION: ORATIO

In order to attend Mass well, receive Communion with fervor and say the rosary fruitfully, we have to ponder within ourselves the importance of those actions. Without that meditation, how can we fulfill those functions as free and conscious actors, or keep from falling into routine and automatism? That is why a life of meditation, oratio, is so important.

1. EXTENSION OF LITURGICAL PRAYER

Personal piety should be the effect of liturgical prayer. Liturgical prayer should carry us to personal prayer, which ought to place in our hearts sentiments that unite us to God, that make us speak with Him. The psalms have us address God directly, and that habit they are giving us is actually teaching us to unite ourselves to Him.⁶⁰

Our Lord said, "*When thou prayest, go into thy room, and closing thy door, pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father, who sees in secret, will reward thee. But in praying, do not multiply words, nolite multum loqui.... Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*" (Mt. 6:6-8).⁶¹

2. THE LIFE OF PRAYER

Many people have the impression that, once they have gone to Mass on Sunday or done something religious during the week, it's over. But prayer needs to be a continuous interior attitude. For sure, we cannot spend all of our time praying; we have jobs to do. And yet we need to maintain that interior disposition, that spirit of interior adoration of God, which makes it so that we

⁶⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 3rd conference.

⁶¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

are entirely submitted to Him, totally in His hands, always desiring to do only His will.⁶²

All of the saints practiced the life of prayer, which is both an effect and a cause of holiness. Many have written on the subject, in particular St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales.

It was because they had a very broad notion of that life of prayer which engages the will and the heart and so fulfills the end for which God created us and redeemed us: to adore God in a total offering of ourselves, after the example of our Lord coming into this world and saying to His Father, "*Behold, I come to do Thy will*" (Heb. 10:7).⁶³

A notion of prayer that limits it to vocal or mental prayer would be a disastrous idea of prayer, which is supposed to involve our whole being, like the prayer of angels and of the elect in Heaven. We cannot separate the petitions of the *Pater*. The three first petitions are indissolubly linked.⁶⁴ We cannot separate the first commandment of God from the other commandments.

"*I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?*" (Lk. 12:49)⁶⁵ That fire is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of charity which fills the Holy Trinity and which created spirits in order to enflame them with that same charity.

That enflaming is the prayer of the whole soul adoring its Creator and Redeemer, and giving itself over to His holy will like Jesus crucified, offering His life in a transport of charity toward His Father and to save souls.⁶⁶

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPIRIT OF PRAYER

The development of the spirit of prayer, of the life of prayer, corresponds to the development of the spiritual life. As long as

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ecce venio ut faciam voluntatem tuam.*

⁶⁴ "Do not separate the petitions of the *Pater*" means that we should not separate prayer (first petition of the *Pater*) from the other activities of life (second and third petitions). In fact, we have to make it so that the affective love of God drawn in prayer becomes effective love in our daily life: personal, familial, professional, or social.

⁶⁵ *Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendantur.*

⁶⁶ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 42-43; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 27-28.

we are not purified, whenever we try to pray the imagination and the memory start to work and off we go... So then we have to come back to God, slowly, peacefully. We can't lose patience and become irritated with ourselves and say, "I just can't pray, I am always distracted, I can't make myself concentrate." Becoming annoyed with ourselves is not how we are going to get there. We have to ask our Lord for the grace of spiritual prayer and gently silence whatever is hindering it.

4. THEMES OF MEDITATION

1. *The life of Jesus Christ*

St. Thomas teaches us that we have to foster devotion by meditation, by contemplation. And he insists particularly on the contemplation of our Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is the way by which we are meant to acquire sanctity. It is in meditating on the perfections of our Lord and on His words that we are going to be sanctified.

St. Thomas says, "Look at the humanity of Christ: there is the means *par excellence* of kindling our devotion. It leads us like a guiding hand. Nonetheless, the divinity of Christ is the essential motive for devotion."⁶⁷ It is impossible that the humanity of our Lord be an obstacle to our devotion, since our Lord is the way, the truth and the life. So His humanity is the great path of our holiness.

Sometimes you may have difficulty finding topics of meditation. Well then, meditate on the life of our Lord. Reconstruct His life. Take the mysteries of the rosary one by one. For the Annunciation, for example, reconstruct in your mind the scene of the Annunciation. There you are next to the Blessed Virgin, facing the archangel Gabriel and near our Lord in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Then for the Visitation, reconstruct the scene: the Virgin Mary leaving across the mountain, her meeting with her cousin Elizabeth, the sanctification of St. John the Baptist and the *Magnificat*. Or else, look at the most Blessed Virgin Mary staying a few months with Elizabeth to help her cousin, who was already old, and remaining there probably until the birth of John the Baptist. You can reconstruct all of the scenes of the life of our Lord that

⁶⁷ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae}, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

way and stay in that atmosphere, in that company of our Lord, of the holy angels, of the Blessed Virgin, of the Apostles. That can only enliven your devotion, your gratitude toward God, your love of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what holiness is: to love our Lord Jesus Christ above all things, to follow Him and to imitate Him.⁶⁸

2. *The Passion of Jesus Christ*

What should our principal meditation be when we think of our Lord Jesus Christ and we try to live with Him? It's His Passion, it's His cross, because it is by His blood that He redeemed us, that we have received divine life and that we even now receive His benefits. All graces come to us by His cross, come to us by His Passion: the Eucharist and the priesthood.⁶⁹

May our crucifix be our book of meditations because everything is contained in the cross of our Lord: His divinity, therefore the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of the Redemption; the mystery of the Trinity as well, because our Lord had within Him the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰

You will meditate on the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that sacrifice is no small thing. The cross of Jesus dominates the history of humanity, the history of the world. *Stat Crux dum volvitur orbis.*⁷¹ The cross remains, the cross is immovable before the vicissitudes of the world. The closer you come to the cross, the more you are going to be crusaders, the more you are going to be crucified, the more you are going to participate also in the divine immutability, the immutability of eternity. Fastened to the cross forever, you will no longer change.⁷²

What is the great reality of our faith which fervent Catholics contemplate 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

⁶⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 24, 1984, 6th conference.

⁶⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 3, 1980.

⁷⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 2nd conference.

⁷¹ "The cross stands while the world turns." The cross atop the globe is the emblem of the Carthusians.

⁷² Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1987.

love of God. Our Lord could be defined as love taken all the way to sacrifice of self. 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.⁷³

If contemplation is a gaze of love upon Jesus crucified and glorified, it is slipping the soul into the hands of God. "*Into Thy hands I commend My spirit*" (Lk. 23:46). And that can only happen by a complete surrender of our will into the hands of God, that is to say, a consummate obedience to His holy will; will signified by God and by those who participate legitimately in His authority and rightly use that participation; will of good pleasure signified by God Himself in the events that touch us over the course of our existence: illness, trials...⁷⁴ Let us meditate on these great teachings of the Church and let us strive to put them into practice in the circumstances of our own life.⁷⁵

3. *The great prayers of the Church*

Take also the great prayers of the Church which you know by heart and which you can run through your mind, such as the *Te Deum*. Think of everything that is said there about our Lord: "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man: Thou didst not disdain the Virgin's womb. When Thou hadst overcome the sting of death, Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father. We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge. We pray Thee, therefore, help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood. Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints in glory everlasting. O Lord, save Thy people: and bless Thine inheritance. Govern them and lift them up for ever." You see, the *Te Deum* is a magnificent prayer which we can meditate on.

And then you can also think about the different articles of the *Credo* and meditate on them, or else take the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*.

⁷³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1982, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 452-453.

⁷⁴ Cf. Dom Vital Lehodey, *Holy Abandonment*, translated by A.J. Luddy, Gill & Macmillan, 1934, and TAN Books and Publishers, Rockford, Ill., 2004, part III, ch. 2-6.

⁷⁵ *Cor Unum* 12, June 26, 1982, pp. 1-2.

That is another hymn to the glory of our Lord. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise You, we bless You, we adore You, we glorify You, we give You thanks for Your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; You take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. You are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High." There is something it would be good to keep repeating now, at a time when they would like to make us believe that all religions are equal. No, there are not many religions, there is only one. "For You alone are God, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen." We need to repeat that over and over again.⁷⁶

If you feel as though you have too hard a time focusing your mind to pray, take a book of prayers, recite the *Pater*, for example, or the *Credo*, slowly, just gently, phrase by phrase, pondering and trying to focus your mind on those prayers.⁷⁷

4. *The liturgical hymns*

Meditate on our Lord Jesus Christ. Take the feasts like that of the Holy Name of Jesus. The feast of the Holy Name of Jesus is perhaps one of the most beautiful liturgies of the Church. The three hymns on our Lord are remarkable; they really do lift us up into the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have taken in particular one of the stanzas of the hymn *Jesu Rex Admirabilis*:

When You visit our heart, O Jesus,
Then truth shines in our soul,
The vanities of the world grow vile in our eyes;
And deep within us charity burns.

That is what we have to be seeking constantly.

⁷⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 24, 1984, 6th conference.

⁷⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

So we have to pray in order to have that deep knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, who is God. It is the very basis of our faith. That is indeed what St. John says at the end of his Gospel, that everything written in that Gospel amounts to faith in the divinity of our Lord (*Jn.* 20:31). Everything flows from there.

That is what we have to try to develop as much as possible in ourselves. We have to make every effort in our prayer to try to see all things in Jesus Christ, to judge all things by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God.

That is one of the essential points of our spiritual life. There can be no profound, solid spiritual life without that minimal knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and without that love, that life with Him.⁷⁸

5. A SILENT PRAYER

In order to learn how to pray, we most of all need to act in simplicity with God, realize that God is our Father, that He knows perfectly what we need, that He knows us much better than we know ourselves and so He knows exactly what we are. I would say that we have to learn to live side by side with our Lord, even if we don't have anything to say to Him, even if there are no words we are wanting to express to Him. The simple fact that we are there with the intention of giving ourselves completely to God, of surrendering ourselves to Him, that turn of soul is enough. That is true prayer, interior prayer, the prayer that sanctifies us.⁷⁹

Interior prayer ought to be simple because it arises from the contemplation of God's acts of kindness toward us, of His great goodness and our misery.⁸⁰ Those two subjects place us before God as children before a Father who is everything.

In order to pray, in order to meditate, it is not necessary to multiply our thoughts, to multiply our ideas, our readings. 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

⁷⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 8, 1987.

⁷⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

⁸⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^oII^{ae}, q. 82, a. 3.

is everywhere. So it makes us happy to be with God, to dwell with Him. 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 put up with it. Yet we can be with God everywhere.

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.⁸¹

The older I get, the more I think that it is the "prayer of the heart" which transforms the soul and places it in a state of continuous offering. That should be where vocal and mental prayer finally lead.⁸²

May the faithful learn to adore our Lord Jesus Christ; they will find joy and peace.

How consoling are those nights of prayer and adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ that we hold in most of our priories! How many souls find consolation there! How many go back home fortified, encouraged to live their Christian life with holiness!⁸³

4.

MEDITATED READING

Spiritual reading can also nourish the life of prayer and even draw into prayer, under certain conditions, as Archbishop Lefebvre specifies.

We could read books upon books of spirituality and not have understood anything at all. If this reading is not done with love,

⁸¹ Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 227-228.

⁸² Letter to Fr. Julio Maria Tam, April 11, 1990.

⁸³ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

we would hardly be any farther along in the knowledge of God than we were before. If we don't do that reading about God with a true orientation of love toward Him, then our heart is not going to be touched. For God to be willing to give graces, to open Himself to souls, to reveal to them a little of what He is, they have to please Him.⁸⁴

We need to seek after truth in everything the Church gives us, as the transmission of the word of our Lord, but we must not have a spirit of curiosity making us devour that knowledge and seek after it in a purely intellectual manner. It's not so we can say that we have read all of the Fathers of the Church, all of St. John Chrysostom, all of St. Thomas. That is not what counts. The important thing is to penetrate the meaning of what we read and try to make it part of our life.

For that, it is important to look for books that can truly be for us a subject of edification and of faith, and which can strengthen our attachment to the Church, to God, to heavenly things. We are not supposed to devour, we are supposed to meditate, we are supposed to read meditatively, especially the word of God. For the texts of Scripture are truly the word of God. So, if we want to understand what the Holy Spirit means to pass on to us, then we have to ask Him. Our poor human intellect is not capable on its own of penetrating the beauty and all the depth of those texts. The best proof is that depending on the people who read the texts or who comment on them, there is a different depth of vision.⁸⁵

5.

SPIRITUAL RETREATS

After the liturgical life, daily meditation and spiritual reading, retreats are another means of nourishing our spiritual life and giving our soul a greater fervor.

⁸⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 4th conference.

⁸⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 18, 1975.

1. THE BENEFIT OF RETREATS

I wish that you could have an idea of the benefit of spiritual exercises and 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.⁸⁶

It is not only desirable but indispensable to take the time of a retreat to truly recollect ourselves and to find God again in our soul, in our mind, by the grace which is in us. Our Lord Himself showed us the example. Even though He had absolutely no need to retire into that solitude, He spent forty days and forty nights in the desert.⁸⁷

In order to sanctify ourselves, we have to retire into silence. Remember that our spiritual life is much more important than our temporal life, than our bodily life. Our mind, our heart, our imagination are caught up in the things of this world, in our work, in our family, and so on. Certainly, we must not neglect all that, but we need to put everything in its proper place. And the first place has to be for God. God has to be our first love. And that holds true even for married people, even for people in the world. They, too, need to go on retreats in order to put everything in its proper place.⁸⁸

The Psalmist invites us to that retreat: "*Lo, I have gone far off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness, that I might find God*" (cf. Ps. 54:8). Our Lord Himself says to the Samaritan woman, "*God is spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth*" (Jn. 4:24). Our Lord says that to the Samaritan woman before revealing to her that He is the Messiah.⁸⁹

2. THE MEDITATION OF THE GREAT TRUTHS

Why is it necessary that you take the time to withdraw from the world? In order to reflect on the great gift which God

⁸⁶ Sermon, Ecône, February 11, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 312.

⁸⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 14, 1983.

⁸⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 23, 1976, 1st conference.

⁸⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 14, 1983.

has bestowed upon you in giving you a soul, and above all in order to receive the light of grace. You will reflect on what eternity is compared to time, what the spirit is compared with matter, what God is compared with yourselves, poor creatures. As our Lord said so perfectly to St. Catherine of Siena, you will reflect on Him who is everything, and on her who is nothing.⁹⁰ So you will reflect on Him who is your everything, and on what you are, namely, nothing. You are nothing because you are only a creature, and a sinful creature at that. So you will reflect on the great love of our Lord Jesus Christ for you, on that immense love which was given to you through baptism, through all of the sacraments which you have received, thanks to His cross, thanks to His blood which redeemed you. You will reflect on those things, and light will come down into you. And what is that light if not our Lord Jesus Christ Himself?⁹¹

3. RETREATS OF ST. IGNATIUS

We all need every now and then to be really placed in front of our last ends, in front of the gravity of sin, in front of the dangers of hell, and we need to reflect on them seriously. The contemplation of the four last things can inspire us with servile fear, that is, the fear of the slave, of one who is terrified at the thought of hell, and who is trying to avoid hell and follow the commandments. But it is not only that servile fear which we should try to inspire in ourselves, it is also filial fear.

And it is true that in an Ignatian retreat, that other form of fear is also inspired in the soul. We can't reduce the exercises of St. Ignatius to the meditations of the first day, on the four last things. We also have to see what follows. And we see that after the consideration of the four last things in the first week, we have the contemplation of all the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are admirable and which inspire us to love our Lord, to have an indefectible attachment to God who came to save us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. These three last weeks of the exercises are magnificent.⁹²

⁹⁰ Bd. Raymond of Capua, *Life of Saint Catherine of Sienna*, part I, ch. 9, p. 63.

⁹¹ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

⁹² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 10th conference.

What touches the faithful, 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. Then people see their own life in a kind of summary. We speak to them of the four 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 mentioned purgatory... three months later, another person spoke about Heaven... and they had certainly heard of 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?⁹³

4. THE MEANS OF REKINDLING FERVOR

I am not at all against the retreats of St. Ignatius, but I do think that it's not the only way to preach a retreat. For example, the meditation on God, on the Holy Trinity, makes people realize the greatness, the almighty power of God, and that also makes us tremble a little. The more we are attached to God, the more we should find ourselves saying, "Never may I displease God; God is so great, so good, so merciful, so present inside of me that I cannot grieve Him." And so we tremble at the thought that we might do something which displeases Him, which is not in conformity with His will, and all the more so at the thought of committing a grave sin, for that would be a total break with God. It has to become inconceivable for us, nearly impossible, so intent are we on conforming ourselves to His will.

So, I think that this meditation on the greatness, on the almighty power of God, also inspires us to turn away from sin, from

⁹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1989, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 313.

all that may displease God, and that it can therefore have practically the same effects as the exercises of St. Ignatius, which make us meditate more on hell and on the four last things.⁹⁴

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!⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶

On these retreats, souls very often really do rediscover a spirit of prayer, a spirit of meditation. People render our Lord His true place in their life.⁹⁷

5. EXHORTATION TO PRAYER

This entire chapter on prayer has shown us the importance it has. Archbishop Lefebvre loved to remind us of it, and most of all his own life was steeped in prayer.

We have to pray. Let us be careful not to chip away at our specific prayer times; but whether we pray in common as a family, or whether we pray alone, let us put ourselves in that atmosphere of continuous prayer, which is going to put us in union with God constantly.⁹⁸

It is not enough to think of our Lord Jesus Christ just during our exercises of piety. We have to live continually in His presence, in a way, so that we instinctively bring back to Him all of the little

⁹⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 10th conference.

⁹⁵ Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 313.

⁹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 314.

⁹⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 27, 1976, 7th conference.

⁹⁸ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 4, 1985, 5th conference.

events that make up the fabric of our lives.⁹⁹

The prayer par excellence is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as Archbishop Lefebvre says in the following text. This theme will be developed in the part on the sacraments.

On the altar we unite ourselves to the great prayer of our Lord. If we truly want to live out the virtue of religion and truly be religious souls, it is in coming before the altar, in uniting ourselves to our Lord, that we are going to do so. It is the most beautiful prayer of all: to offer ourselves with our Lord on the altar.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 1st conference.

¹⁰⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1975.

III

THE SACRAMENTS

After prayer, the second means of sanctification is the reception of the sacraments, which we will now consider more deeply.

Only by baptism is it possible to become a child of God. So the faithful look to the priests to give them those graces of baptism, of penance, of the Eucharist, of marriage, of extreme unction. All of these graces they look to the priests to give them. And they look to bishops to give them confirmation and to give them priests for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and for the Eucharist, which is the gift *par excellence*, which is the legacy of our Lord Jesus Christ. How many graces does God give us by means of His priests!¹⁰¹

1.

THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

1. WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS?

As it says in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, the sacraments are the signs of sacred realities.¹⁰² They are not only symbols, as people today would like to have us believe; they are signs which produce the things they signify.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Sermon at a first Mass, Fanjeaux, July 7, 1979.

¹⁰² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 60, a. 1, 2.

¹⁰³ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 143.

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, *mysteria*. 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.¹⁰⁴

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.¹⁰⁵

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 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!¹⁰⁶

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

¹⁰⁴ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 147; *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 60, a. 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 62, a. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 321-322.

word of the priest for the absolution of our sins.¹⁰⁷ 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. Consequently, our Lord asks 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 humiliate 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 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.¹⁰⁸

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SACRAMENTS

We have to bear in mind the greatness and the necessity of the sacraments.¹⁰⁹ It is so good to remind ourselves of that need to venerate the sacraments, which give divine life to the faithful, which were made for giving them blessed eternity!¹¹⁰

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* insists on the greater necessity of certain sacraments, of baptism for example.¹¹¹

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

¹⁰⁷ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 61, a. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1985, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 322-323.

¹⁰⁹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 61, a. 1.

¹¹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983.

¹¹¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 154.

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.

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.¹¹²

3. THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT AND THE SACRAMENTS

1. *Unusual experiences*

A great deal is being said these days, in the Church, about Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement. Many Catholics today are trying to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit by a new way, by a way that ultimately comes from Protestantism. Pentecostalism came from the Protestants in fact and spread to the Church not very long ago. And when Pentecostalism encountered the Church it became the charismatic movement.

These charismatic meetings are becoming more and more widespread and we have to admit that it is happening with the approval of the Church authorities. We were able to see and hear some of this charismatic behavior for ourselves at the *Katholikentag*¹¹³ gathering in Germany, in Munich, last November. All of the German bishops and cardinals had gathered in Munich surrounded by 80,000 of their faithful. These charismatic manifestations, which really have something strange about them, took place during the reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist. We can really wonder whether they are inspired by the authentic Spirit of God or by another spirit.

At about the same time, in Graz, in Austria, there were charismatic meetings under the direction of the local bishop. The bishop explained that those meetings had been introduced into the Church to attract young people to the churches, which are losing their faithful.

¹¹² Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 324-325.

¹¹³ "Catholic Day," a German festival for Catholic laity organized every two to four years.

At the same time, at Paray-le-Monial, there were other meetings of this kind, meetings which have some fairly traditional aspects. At Paray-le-Monial in particular, the young people spend the night in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, say the rosary, and really show evidence of a spirit of prayer. So there is a strange and bizarre mix of the tradition of the Church with practices which are foreign to the Church, really not customary.

What should we think of these things? Are we really supposed to believe that at Vatican II, and in the years just before, there was a new path opened for receiving the Holy Spirit?¹¹⁴

2. *Experiences not in conformity with Tradition*

Unfortunately, it seems that these new “charismatic experiences” are not at all in conformity with the tradition of the Church. So we can legitimately ask where the Spirit comes from. Who gives us the Spirit? Who is the Spirit?

The Spirit is God. “*God is spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth*” (Jn. 4:24).

Consequently, our attachment to the Spirit should express itself much more spiritually than by exterior signs, by sense experiences. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself announced to the Apostles that He would send them the Spirit, “*who received from Him*” (cf. Jn. 16:14),¹¹⁵ the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of charity: “*I will send Him*” (Jn. 16:7).¹¹⁶ So the Spirit comes from our Lord Jesus Christ and from the Father.

We say it in the *Credo*: *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, qui ex Patre, Filioque procedit*; I believe in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. That is the Catholic faith. We believe that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, and that our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth precisely to give us His Spirit, to communicate to us His spiritual life, His divine life.

And what means did He take? Did He take those which we see in Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement? Not at all; to communicate His Spirit to us, He instituted the sacraments.

¹¹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, May 26, 1985.

¹¹⁵ *Quia de meo accipiet.*

¹¹⁶ *Mittam eum ad vos.*

And we need to insist in particular on the following truth of Tradition: our Lord communicates His Spirit by baptism. He told it to Nicodemus, in that nighttime conversation which He had with him. He told him, *“unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (Jn. 3:5).

We therefore have to be born again of the water and of the Holy Spirit. That is the same way our Lord communicated His Spirit to the Apostles. They first received the baptism of John and then, at Pentecost, they received the baptism of the Spirit.

And what did the Apostles do immediately after receiving the Holy Spirit? They gave baptism, they communicated the Holy Spirit to all those who had the faith, to all those who believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Church communicates the Holy Spirit to souls in the same way, influenced and instructed by our Lord Himself. We all received the Holy Spirit on the day of our baptism. It seems to me that we would do well to meditate more deeply on the great reality of our baptism. At the reception of this sacrament, a total transformation took place in our soul.

And then the other sacraments came to complete that outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of confirmation also communicates to us the gifts of the Holy Ghost, poured on us abundantly because we have such a need of those gifts to nourish, to fortify our spiritual life, our Christian life.

That’s not all: our Lord willed that two other sacraments in particular communicate His Spirit to us, and that they do so frequently. Those are the sacraments of penance and of the Eucharist. The sacrament of penance reinforces the grace which we received on the day of our baptism and purifies our souls of our sins, since we cannot receive very many graces of the Holy Spirit if our souls are in a state of contradiction with the Holy Spirit by sin. So the sacrament of penance gives us back the virtue of the Holy Spirit, the virtue of grace.

And what are we to say of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is given to us through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass? For it is at the same instant that the sacrifice of the Mass takes place and the sacrament of the Eucharist is realized. So, in the Holy Eucharist we receive both the graces of sanctification of our souls and graces of turning away from sin, graces which are every single one a source of the Spirit.

The sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of holy orders are sacraments that sanctify society. The sacrament of holy orders is given to communicate the Holy Spirit to all souls, to all Christian families. And the sacrament of marriage sanctifies the family. So those are new occasions for our Lord Jesus Christ really to give us His Spirit of truth, His Spirit of charity.

Finally, the sacrament of extreme unction makes us ready to receive the true outpouring, the ultimate outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when we receive our reward in Heaven.

Those are the means by which our Lord Jesus Christ willed to communicate to us His spiritual life, His own Spirit. We do not have the right to look for and to select other means than those which our Lord Jesus Christ instituted Himself.¹¹⁷

3. *Manifestations of the evil spirit?*

Jesus took the trouble to institute those means that are so simple, so beautiful, so effective, so symbolic, which are the sacraments. We do not have the right to hope to receive the Holy Spirit by simple exterior manifestations and by particular gestures. So we can certainly fear that those manifestations are inspired by the evil spirit to deceive the faithful, by making them believe that they are receiving the authentic Spirit of our Lord, whereas in reality they are receiving another spirit entirely.

So let us take care not to let ourselves be drawn into these charismatic practices, and let us keep from them anyone in our family who might be attracted by them. We need to tell them that our Lord took care of giving us His Spirit by giving us the sacraments.¹¹⁸

2.

BAPTISM

Baptism is a spiritual ablution. It has the effect of purifying the soul from the stain of original sin and of personal sins. It likewise takes away all the pain due to sins committed.

¹¹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, May 26, 1985.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

ted. It is moreover the sacrament of access to the visible Church of Jesus Christ. The Christian's belonging to Christ is engraved in his soul by the baptismal character.

1. THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

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.¹¹⁹

It seems to me opportune to have a new look at the importance that our Lord gives to baptism of water and the Spirit. It is by baptism that our Lord is constituting the new people of God, destined for the promised land, destined for eternal life.

It is absolutely capital in the work of the Redemption, the fact that He willed to be baptized by St. John the Baptist, and that the whole significance of baptism by water and the Spirit was made manifest there in so marvelous a way.

In His baptism, the whole Trinity appears: Himself in His human nature, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and the Father in the voice that was heard, as a way of announcing the very form of the sacrament.

It also shows the effect of baptism, by the fact that the Heavens opened above His head, for it was to be by His baptism that Heaven was reopened to us, by virtue of the baptism of blood in which He Himself was to wash away the sin of the world.¹²⁰

So we see there the universality of the virtue of the cross; and by the character engraved on the soul, the soul is made capable of participating in the effects of our Lord's priesthood, in the Church,¹²¹ though not capable of exercising the hierarchical actions of that priesthood.

¹¹⁹ Sermon, Zaitzkofen, December 8, 1983, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 293.

¹²⁰ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 39, a. 1-8.

¹²¹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 63, a. 3.

Insofar as they are faithful to the grace of their baptism, those who have received the grace of baptism and who now eternally bear its indelible character surpass in dignity and excellence the totality of creatures left simply to their own nature.

It is that baptism of water, valid and conferring the character, which constitutes a person as a rightful member of the Church, having rights and duties – even if that baptism does not confer sanctifying grace, that is, even if it is not fruitful, as is the case for Protestants validly baptized.¹²² Since they do not have the true faith, they cannot receive grace, but they do receive the character, which will bring grace if they abjure their heresies.

There is rampant in the Church today a teaching full of errors, if not heresies, concerning the sacraments and especially concerning baptism. It is very important to bring out the doctrine of the Church on this subject. The new rite of baptism was influenced by these errors, especially touching the effects of baptism. The true doctrine of baptism corresponds well to the missionary spirit which our Lord breathed into His Apostles.¹²³

2. THE DISPOSITIONS OF THE CATECHUMEN

What are the dispositions which the Church asks of adults who are going to receive the grace of baptism? She asks for “theological faith,”¹²⁴ 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.

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

¹²² At least for adults.

¹²³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 62-63; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 47-48.

¹²⁴ *Fides theologica*.

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.

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.¹²⁵

3. THE RITE OF BAPTISM

The sacramental rite symbolizes what it produces, so we need only follow the ceremony of baptism to know its effects.

1. *The ceremonies at the door of the church*

It seems to me that there is something admirable in the first words which the Church placed on our lips, through our godfather and our godmother, when we came to a church for the first time. The priest asked, “What do you ask of the Church of God? What do you wish, why have you come here?” and our godfather and our godmother answered for us, “We ask the faith.”

¹²⁵ Sermon, April 7, 1984, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 328, 329-330.

We have to think about that. It is something extremely important which the Church puts on our lips at the door of the church, before we enter a church for the first time. She makes us ask for the faith.

And the priest goes on, "But why do you ask for the faith? What does the faith offer you?" The answer is in two words, "Eternal life." It is marvelous. In those two questions, which seem trivial, which are pronounced in an instant, we have the whole program of our life here below and our life in eternity. We ask for the faith. Why? To have eternal life. What sublimity, really, in this sacrament of baptism! And, God knows, if there one thing that today we need to remember, there you have it.

We asked the Holy Church for the faith, and we continue to ask Her for the faith every day of our life. Priests, give us the faith. Bishops, give us the faith. Pope, give us the faith. It is you who told us to ask for it. It is the first thing you told us to ask you for when we did not yet even have the use of speech. So give it to us, since you tell us to ask for it.¹²⁶

"If, then, you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments of God: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." What is the immediate result of grace in us? It pushes us to obey God, that is to say, to observe the two great commandments of charity: love God and love our neighbor.

But, obviously, for grace to take possession of that soul, the devil has to be driven out of it. That is the first thing the priest does in breathing on the face of the child, "Depart from him, unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit." It is clear. The Church truly believes that, by original sin, the devil takes possession of our souls.¹²⁷ If we eliminate these exorcisms, we completely fail to understand the Catholic religion. Today some say, "We are just going through a rite of initiation," which takes place as follows:

"Do you believe?"

¹²⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1987.

¹²⁷ The *possession* meant here, speaking of the newborn, is not to be taken in the sense of the word when we speak of a possessed person, but in the sense that the baby is a slave of the devil as long as the stain of original sin remains in him.

"Yes, I believe."

"Do you want to be a member of the Christian community?"

"Yes, I do."

That kind of prayer does not have anything left against the devil.¹²⁸

After ordering the devil to depart from the child, the priest refers to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, "Receive the mark of the cross on your forehead and within your heart." And to the words he joins the corresponding gestures. Then he goes on, "Embrace the faith with its divine teachings. So live that you will indeed be a temple of God." We see there how essential the sign of the cross is to our spiritual life, to the life of grace. The prayer which follows is in exactly the same vein.

Next, in a series of prayers, the priest begs God to remove anything that may hinder the presence of our Lord in that soul. "Almighty and eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, look with favor upon this Thy servant whom Thou hast called to take his first steps in the Faith. Take from him all blindness of heart. Free him from the snares of Satan which until now have held him captive. Open to him the gate of Thy piety, give him the sign of Thy wisdom, that he not be touched by the corruption of evil passions, but that, drawn by the fragrance of Thy commandments, he may serve Thee with joy in Thy Church, and make progress from day to day in the way of perfection."

Then the priest blesses the salt. The blessing of the salt, like that of holy water, is preceded by an exorcism. The Church asks the priest to chase away the evil spirits which can have a certain empire over material elements. Why? Because in submitting men to sin, the devil in a certain way also took hold of all of the material elements of the world. In the exorcism of the salt, there are nine signs of the cross. So obviously, modern Catholics say, "Ha! What an idea, making nine signs of the cross! What does that mean? Just make one, that's plenty." They do not believe in the virtue of the cross. Yet, precisely, nothing makes the devil tremble like the

¹²⁸ The exorcisms have been eliminated from the new rite for the baptism of newborns. One of the two formulas employed mentions the triple renunciation of Satan before the profession of faith, but with the explanation that "the rite of exorcism concerns the future of those who are to be baptized," and not their past (Pierre Jounel, *La Célébration des Sacraments*, Desclée, Paris, 1983, pp. 232 and 209).

cross. He was conquered by the cross. So, if the priest makes the sign of the cross, the devil cannot endure it.

Then, after an exorcism, the priest makes another sign of the cross: "Accursed devil, *maledicte diabole*, never dare to desecrate this sign of the holy cross which we are tracing upon his forehead." You see how the Church insists on the cross which is meant to drive out the devil and draw our Lord and His grace.

Next, there is a very beautiful prayer to ask for "the light of wisdom, purity of heart, sanctification, true knowledge," everything that the grace of baptism can give. "May he be truly worthy of the grace of baptism and may he maintain firm hope, sound judgment and a grasp of the holy doctrine of the Church." Here we come to the positive. The Church shows everything that the grace of our Lord is going to bring to this soul. All of that happens at the door of the church. Next the priest puts his stole over the shoulder of the child and the child enters the church.¹²⁹

2. *The ceremonies inside the church*

Now the child is going to receive baptism inside the church. That is when the priest makes him recite the *Credo* and the *Pater*, through his godfather and godmother. So the one still to be baptized already is expressing his faith.

Before baptizing, the priest performs another exorcism. "*Exorcizo te, omnis spiritus immunde, in nomine Dei Patris omnipotentis, et in nomine Jesu Christi Filii ejus, ... et in virtute Spiritus Sancti, ... ut fiat templum Dei vivi, et Spiritus Sanctus habitet in eo.*"¹³⁰

Finally, at that moment, the priest asks the godfather and the godmother, or the child,

"Do you renounce Satan?"

"I do renounce him."

"Do you renounce his works?"

"I do renounce them."

"Do you renounce his pomps?"

¹²⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 26, 1976, 6th conference.

¹³⁰ "I exorcise you, every unclean spirit, in the name of God, the Father almighty, and in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, ... and in the strength of the Holy Spirit, ... that he may become a temple of the living God and that the Holy Spirit may dwell in him."

“I do renounce them.”

The priest then truly begins the ceremony which consecrates that child. He makes an anointing with the oil of catechumens, which is also a fruit of the Mass in a way since it is on Holy Thursday that the holy oils are blessed by the bishop, during the chrismal Mass. So it is also a fruit of the holy Mass, a fruit of the cross of our Lord. *Christus* comes from the Greek Χριστός, which means *anointed*. Someone who is anointed is someone on whom oil has been poured. Our Lord is called Christ because He is anointed by that oil which is the divine life, and not by a material oil. If there was ever a person who received the divine life, both in his body and in his human soul, that person is our Lord Jesus Christ, because He is God Himself. The Church represents our Lord, and our Lord is called Christ because He is anointed by all the divine virtue which descends into Him, into His soul and into His body.

That is why the Church readily uses oil in ceremonies in order to allow Christians to have even more resemblance to our Lord. So, the priest signs with the oil of salvation the chest and the back of the child. Next, he makes him state his faith, “Do you believe in God, the Father almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Do you truly wish to be baptized?” He answers, “Yes, I wish to be.” And then we give him baptism, in a very simple formula: *N...., ego te baptizo in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*¹³¹

The water of baptism resurrects the child; it gives him the grace of our Lord. It is a new life which begins. Henceforth, that baby is separated from all others because he has become a member of a family, member even of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Mystical Body which is the Church.¹³²

Then there is another anointing with the holy chrism. After that, the priest gives the child a white vestment, as they used to do on Holy Saturday for the newly baptized. Those who received baptism wore a white garment for eight days to show that they had been baptized, and the Saturday before *Quasimodo* was called

¹³¹ “(The child’s first name), I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 26, 1976, 6th conference.

¹³² Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1987.

Sabbatum in albis deponendis, which means the Saturday of those who were to set aside their white garments, because on that day they stopped wearing their white garments.

So the priest places a white cloth on the head of the child, saying to him, "Receive this white garment. Never let it become stained, so that when you stand before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, you may have life everlasting." This white garment is the symbol of the purity of the soul which is now baptized, which has no more sin, which is filled with the Holy Spirit. It is very beautiful. The child no longer has original sin, but unfortunately he still has its consequences, he has its wounds.

Finally the priest gives a candle to the child. "Receive this burning light, and keep the grace of your Baptism throughout a blameless life. Observe the commandments of God. Then, when the Lord comes to His heavenly wedding feast, you will be able to meet Him with all the saints in the halls of Heaven, and live for ever and ever." And at the end he says, "Go in peace, and the Lord be with you."

Those are magnificent ceremonies, because they have a whole theological meaning which expresses what happens in souls as they receive baptism.¹³³

3. *The promises of baptism*

The Christian has an obligation to pursue holiness, by virtue of his baptism. He has to fulfill the promises of his baptism: "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 assumes 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.¹³⁴

¹³³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 26, 1976, 6th conference.

¹³⁴ Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 104.

4. BAPTISM OF BLOOD AND BAPTISM OF DESIRE

Beyond baptism of water, there is baptism of blood, which is the baptism of martyrs. Those who were not baptized in water, but by martyrdom, also received in themselves the grace and the charity of our Lord. And then there is baptism of desire, which can be explicit or implicit.¹³⁵ Explicit baptism of desire is what catechumens have. If they have the interior conditions of regret of their sins and of detachment from mortal sin, they have grace.

Finally, Pope Pius XII spoke of implicit desire, as regards the salvation of infidels, of those who have neither baptism of water nor baptism of blood, and who are not catechumens.¹³⁶ And God knows if there are infidels in the world today! It is the vast majority of men. Can they be saved? Can they receive the charity of God in them, and so return to God? Well, the Church teaches us that souls have the implicit desire of baptism if they are disposed to do the will of God, making an act of charity as perfect as possible within the conditions where they find themselves, and if they do not know the Catholic Church, but in such an action manifest their desire to conform themselves interiorly and exteriorly to the will of God.¹³⁷

So, think of a Moslem woman or a Buddhist woman who receives an actual grace from God to make an act of perfect charity. In that act is contained the implicit desire for baptism, because in choosing that act, she submits her will to the will of God. She says interiorly, "I love God, and if He asked me for something right now, I would be ready to do it." If someone said to her, "God asks that you be baptized," "Ah! Alright," she would say, "I'm ready to be baptized." Such a soul is well disposed. But she would not be saved by error. No one is saved by a false religion, by a religion which is invented by Satan.

So there can be people who have a well disposed heart, who truly make an act of perfect charity. That implicit desire of baptism confers sanctifying grace on them, but it is through the

¹³⁵ Catechumens have an explicit desire for baptism. Certain pagans could have the implicit desire for baptism (*cf. Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 66, a. 11, and q. 68, a. 2; II^aII^{ae}, q. 2, a. 5).

¹³⁶ Letter from the Holy Office, August 8, 1949, in DS 3869.

¹³⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 6, 1980.

Church that they are saved. No one can be saved outside the Church, outside of our Lord, outside of baptism.

And then that person receives sanctifying grace through the implicit desire of baptism, so that charity comes into her. That is why she, too, is united to our Lord Jesus Christ, united to the Church, even though she does not know it.¹³⁸

But we have to recognize that those conditions are normally very difficult, because false religions are so permissive as regards sin, as regards vice, and so those people generally have vices.¹³⁹

5. THE FRUITS OF BAPTISM

1. *Resurrected with Jesus*

Baptism, by which we die to our sins and resurrect to divine life, is signified by the death of Jesus on His cross and by His Resurrection. That is why we rejoice today. We rejoice to be alive again to the divine life. We sing the *Alleluia*, the *Gloria*, because Jesus made us live again. We are resurrected, as St. Paul expresses so admirably, "*We are buried in the water of baptism and we are dead like Jesus on the cross, and from that water we rise again to the life of God*" (cf. *Rom. 6:4*).¹⁴⁰ There you have the great mystery of our Christian life.¹⁴¹

2. *Child of God*

By the grace of our baptism, we are sons of God, God is with us, God lives in us. It is no small thing; it is what prepares our eternity.

What do we have to do here below except prepare to live with God for eternity? But if we do not have God in us here below, are we going to have Him in Heaven? Are we going to have Him in eternity? So the Church has always taught that, by baptism, we receive that tremendous grace, sanctifying grace which makes us share in the very nature of God, and that consequently

¹³⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 26, 1984, 10th conference.

¹³⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 6, 1980.

¹⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 69, a. 6.

¹⁴¹ Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 43.

we are truly sons of God and brothers of Jesus Christ. What a marvel!¹⁴²

3. *Temple of the Holy Spirit*

At our baptism, the Church placed a lighted candle in our hands, through our godfather and godmother, who represented us. That candle symbolized the Holy Spirit who was coming to dwell in our souls.¹⁴³

The visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit 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.¹⁴⁴

6. **THANKSGIVING FOR OUR BAPTISM**

We should try to instill in our hearts and in our souls the sentiment of profound gratitude toward our Lord for the love which He has shown us, for we come from the heart of Jesus. We are born with the Church, and the Church is born from the heart of Jesus. The water flowing from His heart represents the grace that heals, and the blood represents the grace that elevates.¹⁴⁵ We, too, come from the heart of Jesus by baptism. What gratitude should we not have toward our Lord!¹⁴⁶

If we could understand that immense love with which God has loved us! Not only did He create us, but He redeemed us, He gave us back that divine life which we had lost by original sin, and henceforth, if truly we live as Christians, we can be certain that our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit are present in our hearts and in our souls. What joy, what hope, what consolation in the midst of trials and difficulties! We have to know that our Lord is present in us and that we participate in His divine nature. That

¹⁴² Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1982.

¹⁴³ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 69, a. 4. Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1978.

¹⁴⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 62; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 48, and *Priestly Holiness*, p. 330.

¹⁴⁵ *Gratia sanans; gratia elevans.*

¹⁴⁶ Retreat, le Barroux, August 1985; cf. *the Mass of All Time*, p. 50.

is what God willed to make of us. What ingrates we would be to live as though we did not know it!¹⁴⁷

3.

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is the sacrament intended by our Lord to arm the baptized soul for combat in the defense of the faith.

1. WHAT IS CONFIRMATION?

The sacrament of confirmation communicates to the child of God and of the Church a more abundant infusion of the Holy Spirit than that received at baptism, to allow him to fortify his spiritual life. This sacrament engraves a special character in the soul of the one who receives it and helps him to preserve the faith and the grace of the Christian life.¹⁴⁸

The institution of this sacrament should come as no surprise. It corresponds to the law of growth. A growing child needs more food than a baby. It is normal that during adolescence, we have a more abundant nourishment. What is true for the natural life is all the more true for the spiritual life. It is normal that after being born to the spiritual life we need stronger nourishment in order to grow in the Christian life. It is the sacrament of confirmation which comes to bring this increase of graces and of outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the soul of those who receive it.¹⁴⁹

People tend to give too little importance to confirmation whereas this sacrament is more necessary than ever. It is a strengthening in the faith and in the grace of our Lord. Sometimes people give as much importance to what we call the Solemn Communion or 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.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Sermon, Ecône, March 30, 1975; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 63, a. 6. Sermon, Shawinigan, August 22, 1979.

¹⁴⁹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 72, a. 5. Sermon, Shawinigan, August 22, 1979.

¹⁵⁰ Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 342, 343. It is the custom in certain European countries for children around 12

2. THE EFFECTS OF CONFIRMATION

1. *The Holy Spirit and His gifts*

If children are well prepared for confirmation, this sacrament gives them the Holy Spirit and His gifts, which are essential to the Christian life.

The gifts of the Holy Ghost are not optional or supererogatory supplements, not at all. These gifts are truly necessary for the Christian life.¹⁵¹ These gifts perfect the virtues which we have in us and foster the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, facilitate the action of the Holy Spirit in our souls. And we need that action of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵²

2. *Soldier of Christ*

Confirmation will give us a specific strength for fighting to maintain the faith amid the difficulties that we encounter over the course of our spiritual life, over the course of our Christian life.¹⁵³

The Christian life is a combat, and that is just a fact. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of life, a spirit which combats the spirit of sin. But the spirit of sin entered the world through original sin and we are all infested with it. It is necessary to receive the sacrament of confirmation in order to fight against all that, in order to remain a Christian, a good Christian man, a good Christian woman, in order not to disobey God.¹⁵⁴

Today more than ever Catholics need to defend that precious good which God has given them by the grace of baptism. As children grow up, they find themselves faced with those who want to snatch away from them the good they received at baptism, to make them be no longer children of God. God knows that there are forces today which come from Satan, from all the evil spirits that are trying to snatch from our souls the treasure which God gave us: a participation in His own nature that makes us adopted

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.

¹⁵¹ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^ae, q. 68, a. 2.

¹⁵² Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1974.

¹⁵³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1987.

¹⁵⁴ Sermon, confirmation, Ecône, May 22, 1988.

children of God. All throughout our present life we have a battle to wage. We have to be soldiers and fight. Are there enemies around us? Yes, there are. God knows that things we may see, or read, or hear, carry wicked suggestions. The devil uses all those things to try to make us sin, to attach us in an excessive way to the things of the earth, and to lead us to forget God and to disobey Him. And there is likewise an enemy inside of ourselves, because original sin left traces in us. So we have bad thoughts, we have bad desires, we have temptations. So there is an enemy within us. And the grace of confirmation is there exactly for that, to help us fight against that enemy. It is given to us to keep the enemy from taking all the room, so that he cannot say, "From now on I am king here. Goodness, virtue, have to disappear from the heart of whomever I inhabit." That is what the devil wants. So we have to fight every day against our evil tendencies, against our wicked desires.¹⁵⁵

We need to have the grace of our Lord more than ever. That is why faithful parents are anxious to bring their children to the bishop so that he might administer to them the sacrament of confirmation.¹⁵⁶

3. THE MATTER AND THE FORM OF CONFIRMATION

The matter of the sacrament of confirmation is the holy chrism. It is composed of olive oil and balsam.

Our Lord and the Church perfectly possess the sense of divine mysteries and they have well chosen the symbols which are used for the sacrament of confirmation. The holy oil, the olive oil used in the making of holy chrism, enlightens and burns. The oil which is in the sanctuary lamp gives light, and at the same time it warms. And that is what happens by the operation of the Holy Spirit. The bishop signs the forehead of those to be confirmed with the holy chrism, produced with olive oil, to signify that the Holy Spirit descends into them with His light. He communicates to them the light of the faith in order to enlighten their intelligence, in order to give them the strength to resist all those who would like to destroy that faith. And then He gives them at the same time

¹⁵⁵ Sermon, confirmation, Ecône, April 20, 1975.

¹⁵⁶ Sermon, confirmation, Ecône, June 3, 1979.

the fire of charity to make them love God and their neighbor with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their strength.¹⁵⁷

Why is it olive oil that is used? You have learned that our Lord Jesus Christ had a sweat of blood in the Garden of Olives. So the Church has always had a great devotion for olive oil, because it represents in a way that sweat of blood of our Lord Jesus Christ mixed with the sap of the olive tree.¹⁵⁸

Why use oil and why balsam? Oil is the sign of strength and sanctification. Grace penetrates the soul the way oil penetrates the body. And balsam is the good odor of the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁹

That is what the Holy Spirit gives to those who are confirmed. Our holy religion is such a marvel! By simple means, our Lord communicates to us what is greatest, most beautiful, most mysterious in all the world: God Himself, the Holy Spirit Himself, who is the joy of the angels and of the elect in Heaven. That is what is communicated by the sacrament of confirmation.¹⁶⁰

The question arises here of the new rite, which uses all kinds of oils indifferently.

The Church teaches that the oil used to blend the holy chrism has to be olive oil. For twenty centuries, the Church has used olive oil. The consecration which the bishop performs on Holy Thursday of the holy chrism, mix of balsam and olive oil, is constantly alluding to olive trees and to the olive. Consequently, we cannot use just any oil. That is the tradition of the Church. Theologians have always taught that olive oil was necessary for the validity of the sacrament of confirmation. And now bishops can use peanut oil, soy oil... so we don't even know any more what oil they are using. We can therefore have a serious doubt about the validity of the sacrament which they are giving. All that is extremely grave. We do not want to have anything to do with a doubtful sacrament of confirmation, because we need sanctifying grace in order to be saved. So you are right to choose the bishop or the bishops who

¹⁵⁷ Sermon, Montreal, May 12, 1985.

¹⁵⁸ Sermon, Ecône, June 3, 1979.

¹⁵⁹ Council of Florence, 1439, in DS 1317; DZ 697. Sermon, Ecône, November 9, 1980.

¹⁶⁰ Sermon, Montreal, May 12, 1985.

give the old rites according to the constant tradition of the Holy Roman Church.¹⁶¹

4. THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

Here is how the ceremony of confirmation takes place.

The bishop first calls on the Holy Spirit by his prayers, extending his hand over those to be confirmed. Those are prayers made by the Church to ask the Holy Spirit to come in abundance into the souls of the future confirmed, but it is not yet then that the sacrament of confirmation takes place. When the bishop names all of the gifts, the confirmands sing with the other faithful, "*Amen*. Yes, may I receive the gift of intelligence, the gift of knowledge, the gift of fortitude, *Amen*, so be it." Then, with their sponsor, the confirmands come up to the bishop who imposes his hand on their head and at the same time signs them on the forehead with the holy chrism as he pronounces the words of the sacrament.¹⁶²

The words pronounced by the bishop are the following: "I sign you with the sign of the cross, and I confirm you with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The confirmed then say, "*Amen*. So be it, may the Holy Spirit descend into me. *Deo gratias*, I thank God for having received this tremendous grace of the sacrament of confirmation." That is what the word *Amen* means after the bishop pronounces those words.

Why the sign of the cross as he says, "I sign you with the sign of the cross"? Because the cross is the summary of our faith. When we have faith in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, we believe in the mystery of the Incarnation, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, in the mystery of the Redemption. Everything is included in the cross. That is why we have the cross everywhere, on all of our religious buildings, in our chapels, and I hope in our houses, in our rooms, everywhere.¹⁶³

The sign of the cross likewise expresses the witness which we have to bear without fear before the world. The sign of the cross is

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 4, ad 2. Sermon, Shawinigan, August 22, 1979.

¹⁶³ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

the sign of our faith. We believe in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ crucified. That is what St. Paul says, "*I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2). That is what is continued on our altars, during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And so we should not be afraid to carry the cross on our forehead in front of the whole world.¹⁶⁴

The holy chrism which is applied in the sign of the cross is the sign of strength and of consecration. When we consecrate something, an altar stone for example, the bishop also makes signs of the cross with holy chrism. And those who are confirmed are consecrated to our Lord Jesus Christ by the holy chrism.

At the very moment when they are kneeling in front of the bishop and when he imposes his hand on their head and signs their forehead with the holy chrism, the confirmands receive the grace of the sacrament of confirmation. It is a very brief moment. It only lasts a few seconds, but the word of God is all-powerful. By it, the Holy Spirit takes possession of their soul in a manner more profound, more perfect, more complete.¹⁶⁵

Doubtless, God does not allow us to see that in a visible way. If the Holy Spirit wanted, He could manifest Himself visibly, as He did at Pentecost with the Apostles when He made tongues of fire descend on their head to show His presence in them. But it is not because there is no visible sign that we should not believe that, at the instant the bishop gives the sacrament of confirmation, the confirmands receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁶

The bishop communicates these graces at the moment of confirmation. Then he gives a light slap which signifies that the confirmed are capable of overcoming difficulties, trials and temptations.¹⁶⁷

The sacrament of confirmation makes of Christians soldiers of God, soldiers of Jesus Christ, soldiers of the holy Church. A soldier who is not capable of facing obstacles in his combat is not a real soldier. So the light blow to the cheek which the bishop gives signifies that henceforth, after the reception of this sacrament, af-

¹⁶⁴ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 79, a. 9. Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1974.

¹⁶⁵ Sermon, Shawinigan, August 22, 1979.

¹⁶⁶ Sermon, Ecône, May 14, 1978.

¹⁶⁷ Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1974.

ter having received the Holy Spirit, the confirmed are capable of resisting all temptations, all the suggestions of the devil.¹⁶⁸

Then, when they have received the sacrament, those who have been confirmed return to their place and they recite standing, before the whole congregation, their profession of faith, the *Credo*, the *Our Father*, and the *Hail Mary*. Why do they do that? It is for exactly that reason: they have received the sacrament of confirmation, they sense that they are combatants now for the faith, combatants to keep the faith in themselves and to be missionaries all around them, and so they proclaim their faith before the whole Church represented by the bishop, represented by the priests and before all the angels of Heaven, before the whole Church of Heaven.¹⁶⁹

The profession of faith which they make that day should be repeated by them henceforth on all the occasions which arise in their life, to manifest that they are truly Catholic.

It is not always easy. We are often ashamed to show that we are Catholic because of human respect. In front of people who do not believe, we do not dare to say that we are Catholic, we do not dare to show that we are wearing a cross or that we have a rosary in our pocket. But we must not be afraid, because it is an honor and a grace to be Catholic. We must not be afraid to speak of our faith and to show the signs of our faith.¹⁷⁰

Then, after the *Credo*, those who have been confirmed recite the beautiful prayer which our Lord taught us, the *Our Father*, and finally the *Hail Mary*. We need to thank the Virgin Mary for the graces which we receive, for she is our mother and it is by her that we obtain them. There is no grace, out of all those which we enjoy here below, from the grace of baptism all the way to the last grace which we will receive before we die, that does not pass through the most Blessed Virgin Mary. So we always have to think of her when we receive those graces. We should always invoke her and especially on the day of confirmation, her who was filled with the Holy Spirit.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

¹⁶⁹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 72, a. 5, *ad 2*; St. Thomas says, "He who is confirmed receives the power of publicly confessing his faith by words, as it were *ex officio*," by his very role.

¹⁷⁰ Sermon, Shawinigan, August 22, 1979.

¹⁷¹ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

You see how the Church is a good mother. Through the ceremonies taking place before our eyes and through the words which She pronounces over those who receive the sacrament of confirmation, She is teaching us the grace which is given by this sacrament.¹⁷²

5. AN ABUNDANT OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

It was the role of confirmation to give us the Holy Spirit in abundance to protect that precious life which God transmitted to us and which is the preparation of eternal life. The life of grace, the life of the faith, the life of charity, is already eternal life. All that is very beautiful.¹⁷³

4.

THE EUCHARIST

The book of Archbishop Lefebvre, The Mass of All Time, develops this subject. Most of the quotes chosen here are taken from that volume.

Everything is in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, with its most beautiful fruit: the Holy Eucharist. We have perhaps too much of a tendency to put the emphasis on the sacrament and leave the sacrifice a little bit in the shadows. But we must not forget that the sacrament is the fruit of the sacrifice. It is on the cross that our Lord is the Bread of Life. And it is by participation in His holy cross that we receive that fruit which is the counterpart of the bad fruit which poisoned our first parents. The fruit which we receive today from the cross is our Lord Jesus Christ in the holy Eucharist. He gives us life whereas the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil gave death to our first parents. That is the Eucharist. So we must never separate the sacrifice from the sacrament.¹⁷⁴ The sacrament happens within the sacrifice. So love

¹⁷² Sermon, Ecône, December 7, 1975.

¹⁷³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1987.

¹⁷⁴ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 79, a. 5.

the doctrine of the Church, I beg you; meditate on it so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass might be the great joy of your life and that it might also obtain for you that inalterable peace.¹⁷⁵

1. THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE

1. *What is the Mass?*

1. The sacrifice of Christ

“The Mass is the very sacrifice of Christ, perpetuated on our altars.¹⁷⁶ Ever since original sin, which separated man from God, the sacrifice of Christ, the God-Man, is alone capable of offering to the divine majesty, with the reparation of sin, the supreme homage of the creature to his Creator. The central act of religion, the Mass is the actualization by the Church of the unique and primordial event, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross; the redemptive act accomplished once and for all at the center of History, the Church renders present in the succession of time.”¹⁷⁷ The Mass is the central act of religion; that is exactly what the Church has striven to make us understand.¹⁷⁸

We must not depart from the faith in the sacrifice of our Lord, which was defined by the Council of Trent.¹⁷⁹ The only difference that exists between the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass, is that one is bloody while the other not, and that is all. At Mass, the blood is there, of course, but we do not see it flowing. On Calvary, you could see the blood of Jesus flowing. In the sacrifice of the altar, we do not see it being shed, that is the only difference. It is the same sacrifice, it has the same value, it is the same Victim who is offered, it is the same Priest who saves, it is our Lord. That is essential for us.¹⁸⁰

2. A propitiatory sacrifice

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* contains the following

¹⁷⁵ Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975.

¹⁷⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 73, a. 4, ad 3.

¹⁷⁷ Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, *Missel et Vespéral Romain Quotidien*, p. 821.

¹⁷⁸ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 22, 1978, 11th conference.

¹⁷⁹ Council of Trent, 22nd session.

¹⁸⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 10th conference.

explanation: "The priest is one and the same, Christ the Lord; for the ministers who offer the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, consecrate the holy mysteries, not in their own person, but in that of Christ, as the words of consecration itself show, for" – now listen well to this part – "the priest does not say: 'This is the body of Christ,' but, 'This is My body'; and thus, acting in the Person of Christ the Lord, he changes the substance of the bread and wine into the true substance of His body and blood. This being the case, it must be taught without any hesitation that, as the holy Council of Trent has also explained, the sacred and holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not a Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving only, or a mere commemoration of the Sacrifice performed on the cross, but also truly a propitiatory Sacrifice, by which God is appeased and rendered propitious to us."¹⁸¹ That is what our faith teaches us.¹⁸²

2. *The four ends of the sacrifice*

There were four goals to the sacrifice of our Lord on Golgotha, as in every prayer: praise, eucharist or thanksgiving, the reparation of sins, and the asking of graces.

Of these four ends, the sacrifice of our Lord especially had for us a value of immolation for the reparation of our sins. It is true that our Lord also rendered glory to His Father, and gave Him thanks, of course. But as far as we are concerned, it is mostly the aspect of reparation which is inscribed in the cross. That blood which flowed, the hands, the feet and the heart pierced, the crown of thorns, all that signifies reparation for sin, it is obvious.

However, this reparation must continue in order to be applied to the soul of each one of us, and that is why our Lord instituted the sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is a sacrifice where there takes place an apparent separation of the body and the blood in order to signify the death of our Lord. This apparent separation of the body under the species of bread and of the blood under the species of wine is the sign of the sacrifice, even though, in reality, the body and the blood of our Lord, His soul and His divinity are really present under the two species. The separation is mystical, but the sacrifice is real.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 258.

¹⁸² Easter retreat, Ecône, April 17, 1984.

¹⁸³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 10th conference.

3. *The Mass: Primary devotion of the Church*

Because the sacrifice of our Lord is at the heart of the Church, at the heart of our salvation, at the heart of our souls, everything that touches the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass touches us profoundly, each one of us, personally. We have to participate in this sacrifice for the salvation of our souls.¹⁸⁴

The blood of Jesus, in which Christians have been baptized, calls them to unite themselves to the sacrifice of Jesus every Sunday and thereby to accomplish the most important act of the virtue of religion in union with our Lord and His entire Mystical Body, to the glory of the Holy Trinity.¹⁸⁵

The intention of our Lord is therefore to continue His cross until the end of time by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It seems that many souls forgot this. They were looking for the source of graces in little practices, in the recitation of certain personal prayers, in little devotions to this or that saint... It is good to have devotions, but let us have the essential devotion, the primary and fundamental devotion of the Church, of all the saints: that which our Lord brought to us. There is nothing that replaces the sacrifice of the cross. No devotion, even to the Blessed Virgin, can replace the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And in fact the Blessed Virgin is constantly urging us to come to the cross; she is always present there.¹⁸⁶

4. *The Mass: A living catechism*

What is the Mass? What does it represent? The Mass is a living catechism. What the catechism teaches us: the *Credo*, the commandments of God, the sacraments, the Christian virtues, the prayer of the *Pater*; all that is carried out, point by point, and in an admirable manner, over the course of every Mass.

In fact, the first part of the Mass is the teaching part. It presents the different truths of the *Credo*. It leads us slowly but surely to our profession of faith.

¹⁸⁴ Priestly ordination, Ecône, June 29, 1982; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. xvii.

¹⁸⁵ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 63; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁸⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. xvii.

And if the *Credo* is the song of God's love for us, the second part of the Mass is the fulfillment of that love. As our Lord said, all of the Law and the prophets are contained in those two commandments: love God and love our neighbor.

And everything that takes place, from the offertory and the consecration all the way to the *Pater*, is the fulfillment of the love of God for us, and of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ for His Father. So the two essential commandments, which hold the entire Decalogue, are carried out in this part of the Mass.

Can there indeed be a greater act of love than the act which our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished on Calvary? In dying on the cross, Jesus Christ expressed His infinite love for His Father. And that is accomplished anew on our altars.

On the other hand, the second commandment, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves, is fulfilled just as exactly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who says it, "*Can there be a greater act of love than to give one's life for those one loves?*" (Cf. Jn. 15:13) And our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life for those He loves, that is, for us; and this is accomplished also in the sacrifice of the Mass. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest act of charity which He could have performed to redeem men, His brothers. He gave all His blood as well as His soul, His life for those He loved. And that same divine blood purifies us and sanctifies us during the Mass.

And so the Decalogue is brought to life; it is not only inscribed on the pages of our catechism, in dead letters, but it is lived out; every day, every time the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered, the Decalogue is accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

What an example for us! And that is why we desire to participate in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to have in ourselves also this desire, and this need, in a way, to love God and to love our neighbor.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Sermon, Lausanne, July 8, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. xvii-xix.

5. *The words of the consecration*

1. *Hoc est enim.... Hic est enim*

The words of the consecration: brief words, indeed, but how rich in significance.¹⁸⁸

“This”: it is the sacrifice of the cross continued, perpetuated in its physical and mystical reality; it is the sacrifice of the cross continued by the bread and the wine consecrated and become substantially the body and the blood of Jesus.

“This”: it is the unbloody sacrifice of oblation of the living Christ, immolated on the cross once and for all and continuing to intercede for us.

“This”: it is this body and this blood of Jesus resurrected, becoming the nourishment of His Mystical Body, for it is from the sacrifice of the cross that come the graces of resurrection of the souls of the faithful at baptism, at penance, at extreme unction and all of the graces of the sacraments.

Thus, at the evocation of the priest the cross arises, and upon it the Priest *par excellence* and the Victim *par excellence*, the very reason for being of the Incarnate Word, reason for being of the Redeemer.¹⁸⁹

2. *Calix sanguinis mei*

St. Thomas says that the formula of the consecration of the Precious Blood sheds a fuller light on the mystery of the buying back of our souls and of the Redemption than that of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, because the shedding of blood is truly what best expresses our redemption.¹⁹⁰

What does this blood mean?

¹⁸⁸ This is the translation of the words of consecration of the Precious Blood which are going to be commented: “For this is the chalice of My blood, the blood of the new and eternal testament, the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins.”

¹⁸⁹ Priests’ retreat, Barcelona, March 1971; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁹⁰ “The blood consecrated apart expressly represents Christ’s Passion, and therefore mention is made of the fruits of the Passion in the consecration of the blood rather than in that of the body, since the body is the subject of the Passion.” *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 78, a. 3, ad 2. Easter retreat, Ecône, April 16, 1984; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 104-105.

It is not simply to shed His blood that our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth. It is because that blood is charity. It is the Holy Spirit who made flow the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is His love. It is the sign of His charity for us. That is what the blood of our Lord is; the effusion of His blood signifies that our Lord pours into us His love, His Holy Spirit. The blood of God is simply a wellspring of love.

It is also the sign of penance, the sign of sacrifice. From that moment on, God willed it thus, we can no longer love without sacrificing ourselves. That is what the blood of our Lord gives us, signifies for us and produces in us.¹⁹¹

3. *Novi et æterni testamenti*

These words indicate the virtue of the blood shed in the Passion, the virtue which is at work in this sacrament. That virtue makes us obtain the everlasting inheritance.¹⁹² According to the Epistle to the Hebrews, “*we are free to enter the Holy of Holies in virtue of the blood of Christ*” (Heb. 10:19), and to indicate that, we say “of the new and eternal testament.” Henceforth, it is the eternal testament. By the blood, we participate in the eternal testament. It is the testament of all time, the testament which will continue on in Heaven.¹⁹³

4. *Mysterium fidei*

It is so beautiful, it is so great, so enormous, so sublime to be able to make God Himself descend onto the altar of the sacrifice, that the priest exclaims, when he has accomplished this tremendous action, “mystery of faith.” The priest says “mystery of faith” in the middle of the prayers of the consecration of the blood, because he is aware of the wondrous thing which he has just accomplished.¹⁹⁴

5. *Qui pro vobis... peccatorum*

The words of the consecration of the blood are particularly expressive. Indeed, when the priest says that the blood of the new testament is there and that it has been shed for the remission of

¹⁹¹ Sermon, Fanjeaux, July 7, 1979; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 106-107.

¹⁹² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 79, a. 2.

¹⁹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 10, 1989; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 106.

¹⁹⁴ Sermon, Garges-lès-Gonesse, February 11, 1973; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 107-108.

sins, “shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins,”¹⁹⁵ he is affirming that the sacrifice of the Mass is made for forgiving sins, and so made for infusing in us again the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love; made for reestablishing us in the charity which we lose by sin. That is what the sacrifice of the Mass was made for.¹⁹⁶

6. *Dispositions for assisting at Mass*

Since the efficacy of the Mass for the Catholic depends on his receptivity toward grace, it is important that he know the dispositions he has to foster in order to draw all of the good from these benefits.

1. Offer oneself with Jesus

Let us strive to give ourselves whole and entire to the Father, to the Holy Trinity, through the sacrifice of our Lord. What happens at the moment of the consecration is truly the summit of the world, the summit of the whole Church, the summit of History.¹⁹⁷

At Mass, it is our Lord who offers the Victim and it is He who is offered. So we are caught up in that unity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we are already a little bit priests and victims, we offer ourselves with our Lord, but it is He who is the Priest and who is the Victim. He draws us into the oblation of the Victim as members of His Mystical Body. We cannot imagine anything more beautiful, more profound, more consoling than that oblation, for we cannot imagine a more perfect oblation of ourselves. It would not be possible if we were not united to our Lord by sanctifying grace. We could try to offer our souls then, our hearts, our bodies to God, offer our life, but you see what a difference there is! If we were separated from our Lord – and especially by the stain of original sin – our oblation would not reach God, because without grace we are in the state of sinners. But now that we are sanctified by the presence of sanctifying grace in us, now that we are brothers of our Lord in this participation in the divine nature, it is obvious that our oblation takes on the dimension of the oblation of our Lord, to the extent that we are united with Him.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ *Pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum.*

¹⁹⁶ Sermon, 1st Mass, Brannay, July 15, 1979; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 109.

¹⁹⁷ Retreat, le Barroux, August 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁸ Retreat, Ecône, September 22, 1978; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 94-95.

2. United to our Lady of Compassion

In uniting himself at Mass to the offering of Jesus Christ, priest and victim, the Catholic is invited to unite himself also to our Lady at the foot of the cross.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, who participated the most perfectly, the most profoundly, in the sacrifice of the cross and therefore in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is the person after our Lord Himself who has really the best understood the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. She can give you the explanation of the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is when she was on Calvary, beside the cross, that she participated the most in this great mystery of the sacrifice of the cross. "The Mother of Jesus was standing next to the cross,"¹⁹⁹ and it is the Gospel that says it. Her heart was pierced by a sword at that moment, seeing the suffering of her Son. She therefore had compassion, she shared the Passion of our Lord, the sacrifice of the cross.

So, in order to participate the best we can at the sacrifice of the Mass, to be truly united during all our life to the sacrifice of the cross, it is good to put ourselves under the protection of our Lady of Compassion, of our Lady of Sorrows.²⁰⁰

When we are before the altar, during the sacrifice of the Mass, we can say that we are really present as if we were next to the Blessed Virgin, to St. John and St. Mary Magdalene, at the foot of the cross. It is absolutely the same thing. The blood of our Lord vivifies our souls. In the Eucharistic miracles, the blood flows from the host. The blood is truly present in the host.²⁰¹

When you assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, you can say to yourself, "I am with the Virgin Mary, I am with St. John, I am with Mary Magdalene in front of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And you can ask that the blood of Jesus flow over your soul so that you might be saved.²⁰²

It seems to me that the Virgin Mary, who was next to the cross, our Lady of Compassion, our Lady Co-Redemptrix, is inviting each one of us, each one of the human creatures who is to be

¹⁹⁹ *Stabat Mater Jesu juxta crucem* (cf. Jn. 19:25).

²⁰⁰ Conference to the Sisters of the Society, Ecône, November 19, 1974.

²⁰¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1974.

²⁰² Sermon, Bordeaux, May 23, 1981.

born into this world. She is taking us by the hand in a way, to lead us to Calvary, to make us participate in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁰³

7. *The Mass: Source of Christian virtues*

He who assists at Mass with the required devotion gathers delightful fruits.

All of the Christian virtues come from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I do not know if you experience that, I would say almost physically, when you are at a High Mass, a beautiful ceremony. When the sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated with all its splendor, with all its expression, with all its signification, there is no way we can leave worse than when we came. Unless we have a heart of stone or unless we understand nothing of the ceremony, or we do not unite ourselves to it at all, it is impossible not to come away better, not to come away more pure, because we have just come close to Heaven. All of the words, the gestures, the signs during these ceremonies, all of it is holy, beautiful, raises our souls and thereby purifies them. This helps us understand the chastity of the priest. Since he is at the heart of this heavenly sacrifice, it is normal that the priest no longer have thoughts of the world, even of things which would be permissible. All that has become completely foreign to him because his heart belongs to his Mass, his heart belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, his heart is on the cross with our Lord Jesus Christ. And Christians can sense it, too; they need that.²⁰⁴

We should come away from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass aware that we, who are nothing, have just united ourselves to Him who is everything.²⁰⁵

8. *The Mass: Source of civilization*

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is none other than the proclamation of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has reigned by the wood of the cross, *regnavit a ligno Deus*. He has vanquished the

²⁰³ Sermon, Mariazell, September 8, 1975.

²⁰⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1974.

²⁰⁵ Sermon, diaconate and minor orders, April 3, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 173.

devil, He has vanquished sin by the wood of the cross.²⁰⁶

We can never insist enough on this marvelous invention of divine mercy, which in turn clarifies all of God's Providence in the establishment of the Church, of the priesthood and of all the sacraments, whose center and in a way whose *raison d'être* was to be the Eucharist, fruit of the sacrifice and source of our sanctification. May we therefore give to the mystery of the cross all of its value, all of its place in the divine economy of the Redemption and in its application to souls throughout the history of the Church.²⁰⁷

We should therefore be very attached to the true Mass, which is sacrifice and sacrament, because it is the way all of Catholic civilization is communicated. If there is a Christian spirit in the family, it is passed on to the children. So all of the spirituality of the cross is passed on through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Communion. And the cross and the Mass are truly the profound source of Catholic civilization, the surest and most effective source.

There are still traces of that profoundly Catholic spirit in good Christian families, and above all in families which have the happiness of being able to attend frequently the true Mass and the true sacraments.²⁰⁸

2. THE EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

During the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, at the consecration, the priest changes the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. It is the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which Christ is substantially present under the visible species of bread and wine.

1. *The Real Presence: Fruit of the sacrifice*

Our Lord said, "I came that they may have 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

²⁰⁶ Sermon, Ecône, August 28, 1976.

²⁰⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 57-58; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 42-43.

²⁰⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 11th conference.

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 the priest offers 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.²⁰⁹

2. *Jesus present on our altars*

Where do we find our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we have to go to Palestine on the mountain of the Transfiguration? No, we will find Him on our altars, for henceforth our Lord Jesus Christ is on our altars: that is where we will find Him in all His splendor, and we will have the same sentiments as the Apostles on the mountain of the Transfiguration. That is why we cannot leave our altars.²¹⁰

Imagine a Christian life without the Eucharist. What would we be without our Lord Jesus Christ, without that tremendous gift which God has given us? What orphans we would be, how alone we would feel, a little bit abandoned by God! But with the Eucharist, when we need to speak with Him, to see Him, to tell Him that we love Him, when we need special help, we can go to our sanctuaries, kneel down before our Lord Jesus Christ, stay there alone before the Blessed Sacrament. Certainly you have said some time in your life to our Lord before the Blessed Sacrament, "Come to my assistance, help me, I am in difficulties, in a trial. Come to the help of my family, come to the help of my children." And when you went back out, you came away from the church with new courage. And I am sure that happens after every Sunday Mass.²¹¹

3. *The bread and the wine: Matter of the Eucharist*

There is a very rich symbolism in the bread and the wine, chosen by our Lord Jesus Christ to be the matter of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

There is an indissoluble connection between the Eucharist, the institution of the priesthood and the Passion of our Lord;

²⁰⁹ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 331-332.

²¹⁰ Sermon, Munich, March 6, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 4-5.

²¹¹ Sermon, Ecône, June 17, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 161.

between the Cenacle and Gethsemane. Just as our Lord Jesus Christ chose the vine, the wheat, the grain for His Eucharist and these elements are crushed, that they might become the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is bread and wine that our Lord chose to become the matter of the sacrament of the Eucharist; so also the olive is crushed in order to become the holy oil. Why would He have chosen those different fruits which have to be crushed? Our Lord Jesus Christ said it Himself, "*I have trodden the winepress alone*" (Is. 63:3), and it was He that was then in the winepress in a way. It was He that was going to suffer, to be crushed and that was going to give all His blood for the redemption of our sins. So He willed to choose those creatures which would also be crushed in His image in order to give that holy oil, that bread, that wine which would become the instruments of our sanctification. If Jesus willed to choose those elements and crush them, it is because we, too, ought to become victims with Him, to be crushed also in penance, in trials, in sacrifice, so that we might unite ourselves better to Him. For it is indeed to unite ourselves to Him that we eat His body and drink His blood and receive the holy oils.²¹²

And why did our Lord choose these elements of bread and wine? You know the reason; it is a comparison which is often made but which we always need to bring to mind. The bread is the fruit of grains which are milled together, crushed and united. To make bread, you have to knead it, you have to unite those grains in such a way that they become only one dough and that it be only one bread. The Eucharistic bread is precisely that image of the union of all the faithful insofar as the species of bread are the fruit of that union of grains of wheat. It is the same with the wine: we also have to unite all those grapes to produce the wine. So our Lord willed to choose those elements to show us that we ourselves have to be united in order to be transformed into Him.²¹³ If we do not have charity in ourselves, if we are not united among ourselves, our Lord will not be able to be in us effectively: it is not possible. Our Lord cannot enter a soul which does not have charity. Consequently, let us put our souls always in sentiments of charity.²¹⁴

²¹² Sermon, Ecône, April 16, 1981; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 57-58.

²¹³ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 79, a. 1.

²¹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 17, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 58.

4. *The Eucharist: Heart of all the sacraments*

Here is what the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* has to say about the virtue and the fruits of the sacrament of the Eucharist:

“But with regard to the admirable virtue and fruits of this Sacrament, there is no class of the faithful to whom a knowledge of them is not most necessary... As, however, no language can convey an adequate idea of its utility and fruits, pastors must be content to treat of one or two points, in order to show what an abundance and profusion of all goods are contained in those sacred mysteries.

“This they will in some degree accomplish, if, having explained the efficacy and nature of all the Sacraments, they compare the Eucharist to a fountain, the other Sacraments to rivulets.

“For the Holy Eucharist is truly and necessarily to be called the fountain of all graces, containing, as it does, after an admirable manner, the fountain itself of celestial gifts and graces, and the author of all the Sacrament, Christ our Lord, from whom, as from its source, is derived whatever of goodness and perfection the other Sacraments possess. From this comparison, therefore, we may easily infer what most ample gifts of divine grace are bestowed on us by the Holy Eucharist.”²¹⁵

One commentator of St. Thomas compares the Eucharist to the sun.²¹⁶ The Eucharist is in a way the center, while the other sacraments are the rays.²¹⁷

3. THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION

After considering the Eucharist from the point of view of the sacrifice, then from the point of view of the sacrament, it remains to describe the benefits obtained through Jesus in Holy Communion by souls that are well-disposed.

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

²¹⁵ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, pp. 241-242.

²¹⁶ A.-M. Roguet, O.P., *Les Sacraments, La Revue des Jeunes*, Paris, 1945, p. 377.

²¹⁷ Cf. Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, *Missel et Vespéral Romain Quotidien*, p. 821. Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 159.

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!²¹⁸

1. Heaven in the soul of the communicant

What is that grace which you receive in the sacrament of the Eucharist? It is neither more nor less than the communication of the divine life of our Lord Jesus Christ in you. Our Lord Jesus Christ came down to earth, He took a body like ours to communicate to us His divine life. If we could see today souls as they really are, the souls of people in a state of mortal sin would appear to us leprous, covered with ulcers, covered with a horrific illness. On the contrary, if God let us see today what souls in a state of grace look like, we would be utterly astounded, we would be wonder-struck: "It is not possible! It is not possible that a soul in the state of grace be so beautiful, so divine, so filled with light, so filled with charity! Grace is God in our souls, it is Jesus in our souls. And Jesus is quite simply Heaven."²¹⁹

God is Heaven. Jesus Christ is God. So when we receive God in our hearts, we can say in all truth: "I have Heaven in my soul. I have Paradise in my soul." We should be united to that Paradise in such a way that we prepare the Paradise of forever, which will consist in being in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternity.

Only the true religion could possess that kind of treasure. Only God could have invented such beautiful things, such great things, things so expressive of His love and of His charity for us.²²⁰

2. The Victim in the soul of the communicant

In the Eucharist is the Victim who was nailed to the cross.²²¹ It is something that completely redefines our life because in receiving our Lord, as all the spiritual authors say, it is not He who is transformed into us but it is we who are transformed into Him.²²² Therefore we ought also to be victims with Him. So we

²¹⁸ Sermon, Notre-Dame de Launay, September 4, 1977, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 332.

²¹⁹ Sermon, Doué-la-Fontaine, May 19, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 160.

²²⁰ Sermon, 1st Mass, Unieux, July 1, 1979; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 160.

²²¹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 73, a. 4, ad 3.

²²² See for example St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VII, ch. 10.

have to have that spirit of offering, that spirit of victim in reparation for our own sins and the sins of the world. We have to unite ourselves to our Lord with the same spirit of expiation as He had.

In Holy Communion, it is not only a question of nourishing ourselves on our Lord to feed our spiritual life. We have to know what nourishment we are receiving. We are receiving the Lamb who was immolated for us, the way the Jews ate the lamb at the Passover.²²³ We, too, at the altar, nourish ourselves on that Victim, who communicates to us His spirit of sacrificial oblation, which then allows us, if we are truly suffused with it, to accept over the course of the day every difficulty that comes along, every trial, whatever it be. That is Christian life.²²⁴

3. *The benefits of Communion*

How many times have we priests been at the bedside of the dying! How many times have we brought Communion to the sick! What joy, for those who were suffering, to receive their God from the hand of the priest who came to bring them Holy Communion! What comfort! What a source of courage for them! By this sacrament our Lord Jesus Christ worked a tremendous miracle of His love. So we, too, have to show our love to Him!²²⁵

In Holy Communion, Jesus shows Himself our savior, and He also shows Himself our king, the king of our minds by giving us truth, the king of our hearts and our wills by giving us His commandments to help us to act according to His holy will. So, coming back home, Christians who have been nourished on the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ understand better what is their duty, how they ought to conduct themselves in their daily life, in the life of the family, in the life of civil society.²²⁶

4. *Advice for receiving Communion well*

1. Prepare well

We receive the grace of our Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist according to our dispositions. Many people look back and

²²³ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 73, a. 6.

²²⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 11th conference.

²²⁵ Sermon, Ecône, June 17, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 161.

²²⁶ Sermon, 1st Mass, Besançon, September 5, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 161.

say, "All these years I have been receiving Communion, and I am still the same." But are you taking care to dispose yourself well, to have your heart free, completely free of everything? Empty your heart completely so that God might fill it! If you always keep the same selfishness, the same loves, the same disordered attachments, our Lord cannot be master in you. It is not possible. This is very important, even for the faithful, because the faithful who go to Communion frequently can be very good people, but they are treading water also, always treading water because they do not prepare their souls to receive our Lord.²²⁷

We have to prepare for our Communion: recollect ourselves, pray, ask God for all the graces we need, regret our sins, make an act of contrition – which is why there is a *Confiteor* before receiving Holy Communion – ask pardon again for all the little imperfections we may have committed, in order to have our soul as pure as possible to receive the divine guest who is coming into us.²²⁸

2. Adore with respect

We will never be respectful enough, we will never adore with a heart sufficiently respectful of the Holy Eucharist. That is why it has been the custom of the Church for centuries and centuries to kneel to receive the Holy Eucharist. We should be prostrate on the ground to receive the Holy Eucharist, and not standing. Are we equals of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it not He who is going to come on the clouds of Heaven to judge us? Isn't that what we are going to do when we see the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, like the Apostles on Tabor, who prostrated themselves on the ground out of terror and admiration before the greatness, the splendor of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Ah! Let us keep in our heart, in our soul, that spirit of adoration, that spirit of profound respect for Him who created us, for Him who redeemed us, for Him who died on the cross for our sins.²²⁹

²²⁷ Retreat, le Barroux, 1985; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 152-153.

²²⁸ Retreat, Brignoles, July 27, 1984; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 153-154.

²²⁹ Sermon, Mariazell, September 8, 1975; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 157.

3. Give thanks after Communion

If any sacrament should inspire our thanksgiving, it is this one. It is for us the occasion to meditate on, to look at everything God has done for us.²³⁰

Is there any religion in which God has brought Himself closer to men than in the Catholic religion? God does not consider He is abasing Himself in coming to us and in giving Himself to us in His flesh and in His blood. God is not abasing Himself. He remains God. It is we who have to prove our respect, our adoration toward Him. It is not because God acts with simplicity, proves His charity for us, that we should despise Him; on the contrary! We have to thank Him, give thanks to Him, for having that immense charity, that infinite love, that divine love of dwelling in our midst.²³¹

5.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

It seems useful to give a special consideration to the sacrament of penance, which in many circumstances occupies a large part of the time which the priest dedicates to the apostolate. Falls are frequent, considering the weakness of souls, the scandals of the corrupt society in which they live. Our Lord in His infinite mercy instituted a "second plank after shipwreck," for salvation.²³²

1. PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

Make a good examination of conscience on your usual failings, on the tendencies that you notice in yourself which are not in conformity with the will of God. Examine yourself on these points in particular. Ask yourself if you are truly making all the necessary efforts to free yourself of those tendencies which would not

²³⁰ Sermon, Ecône, Easter 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 158.

²³¹ Sermon, Ecône, June 17, 1976; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 158-159.

²³² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 6; *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 63-64; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 49.

please our Lord. Ask yourself how you are conducting your prayer life, your exercises of piety, on a regular basis, as well as your duty of state. We have to judge ourselves the way God judges us. That is what counts. He will be our judge. How is He going to judge us? Well, let us judge ourselves to know what in our behavior pleases God and what does not please Him.²³³

We have to make a good examination of conscience, but we can't fall into scruples. Scruples destroy our spiritual life. They are a lack of confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ and the indication of a lack of balance and simplicity.²³⁴

The devil is always trying to trouble our souls; he does not like peace. He loves anxiety, doubts, scruples. As soon as he sees that he can cause anxiety, doubt, worry in a soul, he figures out a way to make it believe things that are not true, to make it blow things out of proportion. So, don't let yourself be caught up in those temptations and those instigations of the devil.²³⁵

2. THE ACTS OF THE PENITENT

*The accusation of sins, contrition and satisfaction constitute the "quasi-matter" of the sacrament of Penance.*²³⁶

1. *The accusation of sins*

Archbishop Lefebvre encourages the penitent to make an integral confession,²³⁷ and he emphasizes the great mercy of Jesus in this sacrament.

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* says that "our confession should be plain, simple and undisguised,... such as to disclose to the priest a true image of our lives, such as we ourselves know them to be." But then it specifies that "prudence and modesty in

²³³ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 1st conference.

²³⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 1976, 1st conference.

²³⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 22, 1984, 1st conference.

²³⁶ *Quasi materia*; "The matter, as it were..." Council of Trent, 1551, in DS 1673; DZ 896; *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 90, a. 2.

²³⁷ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 9, a. 2.

explaining matters of confession are also much to be commended."²³⁸

Ask God to show you to what extent you are guilty and to what extent you are not, and then tell your sins to the priest in confession simply, saying things just as they happened in all the simplicity of your heart. Do not be tempted to hide a sin committed in the past, out of false shame. No, we cannot let ourselves be tempted by the devil. If you are aware of having done a grave thing in your past life which you did not want to confess, for one reason or another, do it now for your freedom of soul. We must not keep a sin on our conscience out of fear, out of self-love or out of shame. We are all sinners before God. The priest says it at the offertory when he lifts the host, "Receive, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this immaculate host, which I offer you for my countless sins, offenses and negligences." You can see, we are all sinners.

So let us not be afraid to say very simply in front of God what happened to us. It is not to the priest that we are speaking in confession, it is to our Lord Himself. It is to Him that we are confessing; the priest is only an instrument.

And in the Gospel God showed us His mercy, His goodness, His condescension, His love for the sinner. God knows how many different ways He showed it. How many examples in the Scriptures, in the Gospel, where we see the great mercy of God! Our Lord is always merciful. And our Lord who was in Palestine and who had pity on sinners is the same one who is there in the confessional today when you are making your confession. He is still just as merciful, just as good.²³⁹

The vilest souls, weighed down with the most shameful sins, can still be saved.²⁴⁰

So the important thing is to make a good confession so that, by absolution, our Lord washes our soul in His blood. If our Lord had not accepted to shed His blood, there would have been no way to make up for our sins. But since our Lord shed His blood

²³⁸ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, pp. 289-290; Easter retreat, Ecône, 1980.

²³⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 22, 1984, 1st conference.

²⁴⁰ Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

with the will to redeem all men, the priest can give absolution and so wash souls from their sins and purify consciences.²⁴¹

2. *Contrition and firm purpose of amendment*

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 the firm purpose of amendment.²⁴² Contrition has to be interior and habitual if it is going to be effective.²⁴³ 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 distrust of itself, and in a state of continual vigilance. That is indeed the advice which our Lord was constantly repeating: “*Vigilate – Watch*” (Mk. 14:38).²⁴⁴

To receive the grace of the sacrament of penance, it is enough that we have attrition, which corresponds to servile fear, that is, to the fear of chastisements merited by our sins, and that we accuse ourselves of our sins to the priest. There are people who would not come to confession if they did not have that servile fear.

But we can believe that the sentiment of filial fear also moves people to convert. Filial fear is obviously much more beautiful. That fear begins in the love of our Father, the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴⁵

Ask for the strength to fight against sin, to remain firm in your resolutions, in virtue of the blood of our Lord which is poured over your soul in confession to take your sins away. Ask for the strength not to fall again.²⁴⁶

Firm purpose of amendment should not be a passing disposition in us, limited to the time we are in confession, but it ought to be a constant disposition. We should not say to ourselves when we have left the confessional, “Good, now it’s over; I’m fine for

²⁴¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 22, 1984, 1st conference.

²⁴² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 85, a. 1 and 4.

²⁴³ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 9.

²⁴⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel* p. 67; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 52; in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 341.

²⁴⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 4th conference.

²⁴⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 1st conference.

eight, ten days, two weeks." No! Unfortunately, even as we stand up after receiving absolution, we are still carrying the effects of original sin.²⁴⁷

3. *Satisfaction or reparation*

Sin is forgiven in the sacrament of penance, but there remains in us a disorder established by the sin. The moral fault of course no longer exists, because it has been forgiven, but our soul has been wounded, it has undergone a disordering which has to have reparation. He who sinned in stealing from his neighbor not only has to accuse himself of this sin in the confessional and receive absolution, but he has to reimburse the amount he stole. All of the sins which we have committed can be compared to that theft. We have caused an injustice. We have to make reparation for that injustice even after the sin is forgiven.²⁴⁸

That is why the souls in purgatory remain there until that pain due to sin has been endured, and those souls are perfectly purified.²⁴⁹

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.²⁵⁰

3. ABSOLUTION: PURIFIED BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS

The form of the sacrament of penance, "in which its force chiefly consists,"²⁵¹ is in the words of absolution.

The priest has received the power²⁵² to apply the merits of the

²⁴⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 2, 1977.

²⁴⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 85, a. 3.

²⁴⁹ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

²⁵⁰ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 67, *Spiritual Journey*, p. 52, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 341.

²⁵¹ Council of Trent, 1551, in DS 1673; DZ 896.

cross and of the blood of Jesus to souls who confess their sins with contrition and who carry out a satisfaction for the pain due to sins already forgiven.²⁵³

Absolution received in the sacrament of penance is truly the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which is poured onto souls to wash them from their sins. It is not by the grace of the priest himself that sins are taken away, but by the grace of our Lord, by the blood of our Lord.²⁵⁴ So the penitents need to be grateful and at the same time be aware of the gravity of sin, because sin was redeemed at the price of the blood of God Himself.²⁵⁵

4. THE TRIBUNAL OF PENANCE

*Archbishop Lefebvre explains why we call the sacrament of penance a tribunal, and shows that the need for sins to be confessed orally follows as a consequence.*²⁵⁶

It is that power of judgment 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.²⁵⁷ And our Lord gave that power of judgment through particular words. He could have not pronounced them and simply said that sins should be forgiven to those who had the proper dispositions, but not solemnly give to the Apostles those words which are so important. *“He breathed upon them, and said to them, ‘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)²⁵⁸

The sacrament of penance is first essentially a judgment. And it is the priest who has to make that judgment based on the accusation of the sins of the penitent.²⁵⁹

²⁵² *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 19, a. 3.

²⁵³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 66; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 51-52.

²⁵⁴ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 3.

²⁵⁵ Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

²⁵⁶ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 9, a. 3.

²⁵⁷ “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).

²⁵⁸ Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

²⁵⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 26, 1976, 6th conference.

To retain or to forgive 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.²⁶⁰

So it is in the confessional that the Holy Spirit gives Himself to souls. That is why the Church has always had a great appreciation for the sacrament of penance.²⁶¹

5. THE PRIEST: DOCTOR OF SOULS

In the sacrament of penance, souls pour all of their miseries into the heart of the priest, and the priest carries in the absolute secret of confession all these sins of the world.²⁶² 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.²⁶³

We turn willingly, of course, to those who are abandoned, to those who are sick, but spiritual misery is much graver still, and should in fact be the principal object of the priest's concern.²⁶⁴

Look at the Curé of Ars, look at holy Padre Pio. Those priests spent their life in the confessional. Why? Because they knew that that is where they were pouring out the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ by the absolution which they were giving to souls, and because they were supporting those souls by their advice. Many souls suffer in their heart from things that they can only tell the priest, that they can only tell God. The priest carries all of that in the silence of his heart, because he has to keep the seal of confession.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 415.

²⁶¹ Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1974.

²⁶² *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 8, a. 1.

²⁶³ Sermon, 1st Mass, Ecône, June 30, 1979; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 141-142, and *Priestly Holiness*, p. 270.

²⁶⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 26, 1989; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 142.

²⁶⁵ Sermon, Mantes-la-Jolie, July 2, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 142.

6. THE BENEFITS OF FREQUENT CONFESSION

We should go often to the sacrament of penance, because it gives us particular graces to help us avoid sin and keep ourselves in the charity of God. That is the proper grace of this sacrament. But if we have not committed any mortal sins and we have only committed venial sins, or at least negligences, then the sacrament of penance gives us the graces that make us avoid mortal sin. That is why it is so precious, and why we have to love going to confession.²⁶⁶

Take advantage of the sacrament of penance often. It has the effect in particular of keeping temptations away and it gives a particular grace to keep us away from sin. It is not made only to free us from a grave sin, but also to give us the necessary graces to avoid sin. That is why we ought to use freely the sacrament which God gave us to maintain us in virtue, and particularly in the virtue of purity, in the virtue of chastity.²⁶⁷

6.

EXTREME UNCTION

Before speaking of the two sacraments which directly concern society, namely, holy orders and marriage, it remains to explain a sacrament which is often feared because not understood: extreme unction. It is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ and promulgated by St. James. The Catechism of the Council of Trent explains that it is called by that name "because among all the unctions prescribed by our Lord to His Church, this is the last to be administered."²⁶⁸

Extreme unction ought to be given to a sick person and for a sickness which could lead to death.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

²⁶⁷ Sermon, Ecône, June 9, 1984.

²⁶⁸ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 307.

²⁶⁹ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 32, a. 2. Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 26, 1976, 6th conference.

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.²⁷⁰

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.”²⁷¹

That is what the Church required at the time of the Council of Trent, which means it was required long before then, as well. How is it that we now disdain this millenary, this bi-millenary tradition, and say that we can use any oil we like?²⁷²

Next, to whom should extreme unction be administered? That is a very important question because there are 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.

²⁷⁰ Retreat for future deacons, April 1, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 350.

²⁷¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, pp. 308-309.

²⁷² “The matter of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction is olive oil blessed by a bishop” (Council of Florence, *Exsultate Deo*, November 22, 1439, DS 1324; DZ 700).

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."²⁷³

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.²⁷⁴ 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."²⁷⁵

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."²⁷⁶

²⁷³ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 311.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 314.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 315.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

So, considering all the marvelous effects of this sacrament, as it also says in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*,²⁷⁷ we should not wait until the sick person is actually unconscious, in a coma, before giving it to him.²⁷⁸

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,²⁷⁹ I say to myself that these souls have been consoled and prepared to receive the grace of final perseverance.²⁸⁰

7.

HOLY ORDERS

As the founder of a priestly work, the Society of Saint Pius X, Archbishop Lefebvre spoke a great deal about the priesthood, especially during the last twenty years of his life. His principal considerations have been gathered in the book entitled Priestly Holiness, of which we give here a few passages.

1. WHAT IS THE PRIEST?

1. *Another Christ*

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

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a mediator.²⁸¹ 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.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

²⁷⁸ Easter retreat, Ecône, April 2, 1980, in *Priestly Holiness*, 351-353.

²⁷⁹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 73, a. 6, *ad* 3.

²⁸⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1980, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 472.

²⁸¹ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 22, a. 1.

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.²⁸² He too is a pontiff, forming a bridge between humanity and God, but purely as a minister of our Lord.²⁸³ 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 which is transforming souls today by communicating the divine life to them.²⁸⁴

Priests are like an additional humanity 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”²⁸⁵ that they pronounce these words. Priests are therefore truly privileged members of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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 can realize the tremendous miracle of transubstantiation, of His presence in the host, in the Eucharist, and He does it by using His priests.²⁸⁶ 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.²⁸⁷

²⁸² *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 63, a. 3.

²⁸³ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 36, a. 3, *ad* 2.

²⁸⁴ Sermon, Ecône, December 4, 1988., in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 199-201.

²⁸⁵ *In persona Christi*.

²⁸⁶ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 37, a. 2.

²⁸⁷ Sermon, Montalenghe, August 22, 1982, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 201-202.

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 priesthood is “the power of consecrating and offering the body and blood of our Lord,”²⁸⁸ to 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.²⁸⁹

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.²⁹⁰

2. *Responsible for the salvation of souls*

The good God willed that men help Him save souls. 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.²⁹¹

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.²⁹²

2. THE THREE FUNCTIONS OF THE PRIEST

The priest continues the mission of Jesus Christ by his teaching, by the administration of the sacraments and by the government of souls. These three functions correspond to the three powers received at his ordination: potestas docendi, potestas sanctificandi, potestas regendi.

²⁸⁸ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 318; Council of Trent, 1563, in DS 1771; DZ 961.

²⁸⁹ Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 209.

²⁹⁰ Priestly ordination, Ecône, September 20, 1980, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 203.

²⁹¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 297.

²⁹² Sermon, Bienne, July 14, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 298.

1. Preaching

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).²⁹³

The mission of the priest is to preach the Gospel²⁹⁴ 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.²⁹⁵

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. 1 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.²⁹⁶

St. Paul writes, “If Jesus Christ has not risen, vain is your faith” (1 Cor. 15:17). There is no use believing in our Lord Jesus Christ if

²⁹³ Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 301.

²⁹⁴ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 36, a. 2, ad 1.

²⁹⁵ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 304.

²⁹⁶ Sermon, Censingen, June 28, 1980, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 302.

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*" (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.²⁹⁷

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 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.²⁹⁸

We ought to preach everywhere that there can never be happiness here below without the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, April 19, 1987, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 306-307.

²⁹⁸ Sermon, Ecône, October 29, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 307-308.

²⁹⁹ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 308.

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.³⁰⁰

2. *The dispensing of graces*

1. To communicate Jesus Christ

Our Lord willed that priests be the instruments to communicate eternal life to souls and He confided the sacraments to them.³⁰¹ 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 the need to venerate the sacraments which they give to the faithful!³⁰²

“Do this in memory of Me” (Lk. 22:19; 1 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.³⁰³

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.

In giving them our Lord Jesus Christ, he is giving them Heaven, he is giving them eternal life, he is forgiving their sins; he

³⁰⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 307.

³⁰¹ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 34, a. 1, ad 3 and q. 35, a. 1.

³⁰² Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 320-321.

³⁰³ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 323.

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. What could a priest do that would be more beautiful? What could be more beautiful in a man's life than to give our Lord Jesus Christ to others?³⁰⁴

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!³⁰⁵

2. To prepare souls

It is very useful always to keep in mind that grace is efficacious, grace is fruitful based on the dispositions of those receiving it. The treatise on justification in theology 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."³⁰⁶ That principle is absolutely essential in the apostolate because it shows us how much we have to prepare people to receive grace. 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.³⁰⁷

We sometimes use this saying: "The sacraments are for

³⁰⁴ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 332-333.

³⁰⁵ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 353.

³⁰⁶ *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur.*

³⁰⁷ Conference to deacons, April 12, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 325.

men.”³⁰⁸ It is true, but 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.³⁰⁹

3. *The government of souls*

Archbishop Lefebvre exhorts his priests to be good shepherds in the footsteps of the divine Master.

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.³¹⁰

The pontifical says that “the office of the priest is to govern.”³¹¹ 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).

³⁰⁸ *Sacramenta propter homines.*

³⁰⁹ Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 325-326.

³¹⁰ Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 354.

³¹¹ *Sacerdotem oportet praeesse* (Roman Pontifical, admonition to ordinands).

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.³¹²

It is good to read and reread the Gospel in order to see what advice our Lord gave to His Apostles in their apostolate and to see His own manner of acting. That is very important for the fruits of the apostolate.³¹³

Remember the 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.³¹⁴

3. THE MASS: SOURCE OF A TRUE APOSTOLATE

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. 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.³¹⁵

³¹² Sermon, Ecône, September 21, 1980, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 354-355.

³¹³ Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 356-357.

³¹⁴ Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 357.

³¹⁵ Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 28, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 380.

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.³¹⁶

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 in vain!³¹⁷

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.

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

³¹⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 380.

³¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 25, 1975, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 381.

the ideal of the true priest, an ideal which brings him a lasting joy and peace of soul.³¹⁸

4. INVITATION TO PERSEVERANCE

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.³¹⁹

8.

MARRIAGE

The present chapter is not meant as a complete treatise on marriage, but rather as a summary of principles, many of which have already been expressed over the course of this book and illustrated with practical advice. Archbishop Lefebvre does not claim to offer ready-made solutions to resolve particular cases, but gives principles which will allow parents to sanctify themselves and educate their children in a Christian manner. He reminds Christian spouses that their nature is wounded, he redefines true love, and finally he insists on the central place which the Mass and frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist ought to hold in a Catholic home.

³¹⁸ Sermon, Le Pointet, July 13, 1980, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 381-382.

³¹⁹ Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 29, 1986, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 386.

1. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of children. Thus, conjugal union finds its full meaning in paternity and maternity. Marriage is likewise a source of human perfection for the man and for the woman, who put in common their complementary qualities. Faithful and generous spouses are called to bring one another to maturity in the midst of the joys and pains inherent to every human life, in the midst of the responsibilities which they take on together, and through the profound affection which they bear for one another. In marriage as a sacrament, these values are maintained, purified, elevated, in order to serve the sanctification of the spouses.

1. The institution of marriage

In a few words, Archbishop Lefebvre describes the origin of marriage and its elevation to the dignity of a sacrament.

It is from God that comes the very institution of marriage, its ends, its laws, its bonds; it is men who are the authors of particular marriages in which are bound up the duties and the goods established by God.³²⁰ That is the veritable origin of marriage such as God willed it from all eternity.³²¹

It is very important to think about the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ chose to work His first miracle during 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.³²²

I think we do not meditate enough on the greatness of marriage. Marriage is too often considered as something purely human, whereas our Lord Jesus Christ willed to make it a sacrament. Our Lord made marriage something divine, something supernatural. May those who are bound by the ties of marriage think a little bit about that.³²³

³²⁰ The goods of marriage are children, fidelity and the sacrament (*cf. Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 49, a. 2).

³²¹ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 11, 1950; *cf. Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 17.

³²² Sermon, Ecône, January 9, 1977, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 347.

³²³ Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979.

2. *The fruit of the Passion of Jesus*

God willed to create woman during the sleep of Adam by drawing from his side what was necessary for the creation of woman. When our Lord bowed His head and died, His heart was pierced and it is from His heart that was born His mystical Spouse, the Church. What a beautiful comparison! The birth of the woman is the symbol of the birth of the Church from the side of our Lord pierced by the lance. And that is the meaning of marriage. The grace of marriage is a grace which comes from the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and which is symbolized by His sacrifice. So marriage is associated in a very special way with the sacrifice of Calvary. That is why the Church has always willed that marriage be conferred during the sacrifice of the Mass. All that has a remarkable significance, a tremendous significance, and ought to encourage those who are in the bonds of marriage, in their difficulties, in their trials.³²⁴

3. *The properties of marriage*

Common sense, which is the expression of true wisdom, along with the Holy Scriptures and Tradition, teaches us that the properties of marriage are two-fold: unity and indissolubility.

These two properties, which refuse on the one hand the presence of a third party in marriage and on the other hand any possibility of breaking the bond established by the contract between the two spouses, plunge their deepest roots in that human nature which God Himself established. The very nature of the matrimonial contract, which is to constitute the familial society by the presence of children, absolutely demands the perfect unity and stability of marriage.

St. Thomas says that conjugal fidelity and the procreation of children are implied by the conjugal consent itself, and consequently, if a contrary condition were stipulated in the consent which establishes the marriage, there would in fact be no marriage.³²⁵

The conjugal union therefore brings everything together in an intimate harmony: souls more closely than bodies.

³²⁴ Sermon, Unieux, July 1, 1979; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 88-89.

³²⁵ Cf. *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 49, a. 2, and q. 47, a. 5.

To admit in the marriage contract that the bond might be broken is not only contrary to the nature of conjugal society, contrary to human nature, but also and especially contrary to the very end of marriage, the domestic society.

What will become of the children, those divided beings, sadder than orphans, who draw from the affection of their mother a hatred for their father, and who learn from the father to curse their mother?³²⁶

Think of all the divorces, those families torn apart, those children who no longer know whom to go to, their father or their mother, who are abandoned, as it were, who are also completely torn apart. Later, unfortunately, the bad example which they knew in their family will sometimes be for them, too, an encouragement to do evil, because often they were traumatized by what happened in their home.³²⁷

So can we even imagine a marriage contract that would admit the possibility of such a disintegration of the family and that would threaten the children with an existence forever wounded in its deepest affections? The willed, consented union of two human beings endowed with intelligence and will, for an end such as that of marriage, which consists in a mutual gift with the desire of constituting a family, could never be merely provisional.³²⁸

4. *The marvelous fruits of a Christian marriage*

Marriage is for the birth of the Christian family and for the birth of vocations which will come in the future, the birth of children who will consecrate themselves to God. It is truly the birth of the Church. The sanctification of the family by the cross, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is very important. That is where family virtues are born.

Since society is none other than the gathering of families, then if families sanctify themselves, society will be holy. That is how the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the source of Christian civiliza-

³²⁶ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 11, 1950; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 17-18.

³²⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 3rd conference.

³²⁸ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 11, 1950; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 18.

tion. The Catholic societies that used to exist were built around the altar.³²⁹

2. THE SPOUSES

1. *Love God in one's spouse*

Here is a passage in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas which I have often used for sermons at weddings.³³⁰ St. Thomas has two phrases 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."³³¹ 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."³³² 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.³³³

Spouses who live selfishly do not actually love each other. That is just selfishness side by side. To love a person because he flatters us or for other reasons like that, is not to love, it is to encourage his faults. With patience and charity, we have to help him correct his defects.³³⁴

What do a father and a mother do who are conscious of their duties, if not sacrifice themselves for the love of their family and for one another? You have to sacrifice yourself or there is no love. Sacrifice is a condition of love and our Lord showed it to us, His

³²⁹ Spiritual conference, Zaitzkofen, February 7, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 90.

³³⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^aII^{ae} q. 25, a. 1, ad 1.

³³¹ *Amatur homo propter illud quod est Dei in ipso*.

³³² *Hoc debemus in proximo diligere ut in Deo sit*.

³³³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 6, 1981, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 345.

³³⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1978, 7th conference.

arms stretched on the cross, His hands and feet pierced, His heart opened. That is the sacrifice of our Lord out of love for His Father offended by sin and out of love for His neighbor, for the salvation of souls: a great lesson of love through sacrifice!³³⁵

2. *Open your home to life*

Conjugal life is a school of generosity and chastity

1. The welcoming of children

The fruitfulness of the marriage of our Lord and His Church is signified by His Passion, by His blood which flowed to give birth to the whole Christian family. And that is the signification which is applied to the sacrament of marriage.³³⁶

Just as that union between our Lord Jesus Christ and His mystical Spouse has produced countless children and has been extraordinarily fruitful, so also the spouses have to love one another, give their life for one another if need be that they also may spread natural and supernatural life.³³⁷

Christian families, I beg of you, keep far from you anything which may hinder the coming of children into your home. There is no more beautiful gift which God can give to a home than to have many children. Have large families; a large family is the glory of the Catholic Church. It was so in Canada, it was so in Holland, it was so in Switzerland, it was so in France; everywhere a large family was the joy of the Church and the prosperity of the Church. They will be so many elect for Heaven. So do not limit the gifts of God, I beg you; do not listen to those abominable slogans which destroy the family, which ruin health, which ruin a household and cause divorce.³³⁸

It is marvelous - I am not exaggerating - to see the Church continuing in traditional circles with the same kind of families as we had before, not limiting themselves to one or two children. We see five, six, ten children in families. Our circles are overflowing with children, babies in their mothers' arms. The future of the Church is there. And we see the faith and the happiness reflected

³³⁵ Sermon, 1st Mass, Rouen, May 1, 1980.

³³⁶ Easter retreat, Ecône, April 6, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 89.

³³⁷ Sermon, 1st Mass, Fanjeaux, July 7, 1979; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 89.

³³⁸ Sermon, Paris, September 23, 1979.

on the faces of parents, happy to have beautiful Christian families.³³⁹

2. The practice of conjugal chastity

Thanks be to God, there still exist Christian homes, homes which live in continence, which live as God asked them to live, as Christian parents, with the desire of having many children and raising them in a Christian manner.³⁴⁰

It seems to me that the very atmosphere of our religious ceremonies, of the liturgy, teaches us the virtue of chastity, a virtue which is also necessary for people in the married state. What an example for them to see the priest practice that virtue! 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 the example of priests who express that virtue in their bearing, in their manner of living. 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 going to disappear in Christian homes.³⁴¹

3. *By contact with Jesus in the host*

You see with what delicacy our Lord shows what He is thinking when He changes water into wine at Cana. 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.

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.³⁴²

We can say in all truth that spouses who frequently assist at the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross, therefore at the renewal of the nuptials of our Lord with His Church, are resurrecting the sac-

³³⁹ Sermon, Ecône, confirmation, May 26, 1985.

³⁴⁰ Sermon, Ecône, April 6, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 162.

³⁴¹ Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975; cf. *Priestly Holiness*, p. 154.

³⁴² Sermon, Ecône, January 9, 1977, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 347-348.

ramental grace of their marriage and increasing that particular grace which they need in order to accomplish worthily, as true Christians, what is asked of them in marriage. They have to assist at holy Mass. Holy Mass is truly the foundation stone of the Christian family. The Church willed it that way.³⁴³

In receiving Communion, we are participating in the Victim who has offered Himself. So we also participate in the state of victim, in the state of a soul which offers itself with our Lord, which offers its whole life with our Lord. All our life is a cross that we carry with our Lord. We are victims with our Lord. There is not an act we perform, day in or day out, which is not meritorious and which does not merit for us eternal life, provided that it be in conformity with the law of God and that we offer it with our Lord. Ah, how that orientation transforms your life! How it makes you able to endure the difficulties in a household! That is what makes the union, what makes the strength of Catholic homes and what encourages the spouses to carry their crosses together!³⁴⁴

3. CHILDREN

1. *Parents are responsible for education*

Children are the extension of parents and that is why parents have the duty to raise them, to educate them, to prepare them for life, by instilling in them the principles of the faith, the practice of virtues, the necessary knowledge to make their life easier by orienting them toward a profession.³⁴⁵

2. *Baptize children as soon as possible*

Before the beginning of His public life, our Lord sanctified the waters of the Jordan and in so doing sanctified the water which would flow on the foreheads of all those who would be baptized throughout the ages. It is another great lesson for Christian families and an invitation to baptize their children as soon as

³⁴³ Easter retreat, Ecône, April 6, 1980; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 89. The sacramental grace of marriage is a grace which gives to spouses the courage to accomplish their conjugal and parental mission in a holy manner.

³⁴⁴ Sermon, Massongex, March 20, 1977; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 156.

³⁴⁵ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, Lent 1955; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 69.

possible, to make them part of that family of the Holy Trinity, to make them already a part of the family of Heaven.³⁴⁶

Canon Law says we have to baptize children *quam primum*, as soon as possible, to avoid the risk of having them die before receiving baptism and thereby grace. Not baptizing them as soon as possible is a failure in justice toward them. Children have a right to expect baptism from their Christian parents. It is a misunderstanding of the greatness of the supernatural state which God gives us by sanctifying grace, to leave children without baptism for a month, two months, because the godfather or the godmother are absent, or else because we want to have a little party. Those priorities show how little faith those people have who behave that way. My Lord! we never know, the child could have an accident and die without baptism. So we have to baptize children as soon as possible.³⁴⁷

3. *Teach the children to pray*

It seems that a child at his birth, if he were aware of what he is and of what he owes to God, would already in his heart adore God, thank God for having created him, and even from a purely natural standpoint. It would be justice that the human soul barely created turn toward its God to praise Him: "I am like our Lord Jesus Christ; I have come into this world to do Your holy will" (*cf. Heb. 10:9*). That is what should be the first movement of the soul as soon as it is created. That is what parents need to instill in their children as soon as they are capable of understanding that they are creatures of God. That virtue of religion is practiced above all through adoration, not merely exterior but interior.³⁴⁸

We have to teach children to express their adoration toward our Lord, teach them to make a good genuflection before the Blessed Sacrament, to kneel down for a certain amount of time before sitting, to adore the greatness of God when they come into a church.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Sermon, Ecône, January 8, 1989, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 346-347.

³⁴⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980.

³⁴⁸ Sermon, Lyon, February 8, 1976; *cf. The Mass of All Time*, p. 53.

³⁴⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 7th conference.

Children and adults have to pray, because it is in prayer that the creature truly finds his fulfillment, his life. Our life ought to be a life of prayer. A soul which does not pray is not corresponding to the reason it was created.³⁵⁰

4. *Prudence in education*

Education is a question of balance. It is simply a wise mix of indulgence and firmness, of austerity and relaxation. Archbishop Lefebvre warns against a certain laxity in education, but he also invites educators to a spirit of mercy.

1. The necessary firmness

Let us give to children a solid ascetic education which carries them to the respect and the practice of the fundamental Christian virtues: fraternal charity, humility, docility, obedience, abnegation.³⁵¹

We therefore have to give to children energetic habits and know how to master that nature which always has a tendency to do what it wants and not what it ought. We can measure self-possession and self-mastery by the little details of life. And we have to seek them not so that our children might become ascetics or Spartans. It is not a question of educating children the way you train an animal, either. It is a question of helping them to belong totally to our Lord, so that on the day our Lord asks them for something which costs them, they are going to be so used to being submitted to Him that they will say yes.

Alas, too often, our modern way of educating is deplorable. Selfishness has been cultivated in children because parents are too much at their children's service and have not accustomed them enough to sacrifice, have not encouraged them enough to think of their brothers and sisters, to think of others. People have flattered their children, they have served them hand and foot, they were always asking them what they wanted. The child wanted to eat, they gave him something to eat. He wanted to drink, they gave him something to drink. He wanted to go outside, they let him go outside. Parents were always at his service. That is an absolutely deplorable education. It never occurred to parents to say to their

³⁵⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

³⁵¹ Letter to Brother Priests, Rome, March 25, 1960, in *Lettres Pastorales et Ecrits*, p. 122.

children, "Come now, make a sacrifice; you can learn how to do without something." As soon as the child asked for anything, right away they gave it to him.

So children who have been educated that way have a hard time thinking that there are other people around them. They only think about themselves. It would never occur to them to take care of their neighbor, of someone who is sick, for example, because no one ever taught them to think about others before thinking of themselves. That is what makes sacrifice extremely difficult for many young people. They were not educated to doing without.³⁵²

Parents should already be making their children obey by the time they are two, three, four, five years old. As good Christians, they need to realize that their children are wounded. They have those wounds that are left in every man after original sin, and right away we can see the beginnings of defects, selfishness, weakness.³⁵³

Therefore, parents must not flatter the faults of their children. They must not love their little naughtiness, their little selfishness, their little pride. For example, they should not say about them, "Oh! That little one is so funny, look at that, he is so lively! He is so willful!" Ah! he is willful because he is prideful. Soon we are going to be calling it a quality. You are flattering him, you are flattering his vice, he will be even more prideful afterwards. Do not tell him, "Aw! Look at my little fellow, he's going to be a rascal, just you watch!" Oh, yes, quite a rascal! In a few years he may well be causing his parents to weep with his bad habits and his evil tendencies. We have to love in children what comes from God and not what comes from the devil, from sin and from all the evil tendencies.³⁵⁴

That is why parents have to correct their children right away. If parents abandon their children to their disorders, their defects are only going to grow, until the children are in real danger of committing grave sins because no one helped to them correct themselves.³⁵⁵

³⁵² Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 20, 1976.

³⁵³ Spiritual conference, Ecône October 27, 1983.

³⁵⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 9th conference.

³⁵⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 25, 1984, 8th conference.

It is the parents' job to correct those wounds through grace, through prayer, through the sacraments, through advice, through example, and so on. Children raised in that way settle right into the order where they ought to live and later on they will give consolations to their parents.³⁵⁶

2. A merciful spirit

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 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 any good educator. 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.³⁵⁷

3. The apprenticeship of freedom

We have to hope that, by an authentic education in true freedom, which means doing good spontaneously, these persons might become worthy of the name and learn how to use their freedom in conformity with the will of the Creator. Such

³⁵⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 27, 1983.

³⁵⁷ Mercy corresponds to the gift of counsel which is what perfects prudence. *Summa Theologica*, II²II^{ae}, q. 52, a. 4. Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 264-265.

an education can only occur through the influence of religion. An education from which God is absent inevitably leads to moral license, in other words a bad use of freedom.³⁵⁸

In the family, cracking down on some evil is part of parents' duty in the education of their children, whenever there is a truth the children have to be taught or a virtue they have to acquire. Nonetheless, when adolescence comes along, a successful education should be turning into an apprenticeship of freedom, which means more an appeal to self-discipline than a cracking down.³⁵⁹

5. *Painful situations*

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.³⁶⁰

6. *The school*

1. The secularization of schools

What is going to become of the young people who are being formed in Catholic schools today or in secular schools? What faith

³⁵⁸ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, Lent 1955; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, pp. 75-76.

³⁵⁹ *Mes Doutes sur la Liberté Religieuse*, Clovis, 2000, p. 119; cf. *Religious Liberty Questioned - The Dubia: My Doubts about the Vatican II Declaration of Religious Liberty*, Angelus Press, 2000.

³⁶⁰ Sermon, Ecône, January 9, 1977, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 348.

are they going to have? What idea of the moral law are they going to have, what ideal? We can already see the consequences of that progressive secularization, not only in public schools but also in Catholic schools, which for all intents and purposes are doing practically the same thing as state schools. In every country, we observe that influence which is certainly Masonic and which is trying to gain control over the free schools, over Catholic schools, in order to impose on them little by little their programs, their authors, in order to bring them into line with state schools.³⁶¹

In our schools, the results of children at standardized exams are superior to those of other schools. They have better grades than the others. Yes, God allows that. So we cannot give in to the spirit of the pagans and the enemies of our Lord.³⁶²

2. The duty of parents

At a time when there were still very few schools that were fully Catholic, Archbishop Lefebvre advised mothers of families to teach their children themselves.

If you have to, you will teach your children yourselves. If the schools are corrupting your children, what are you going to do? Give them to corrupters, to those who are teaching those abominable sexual practices in schools? Catholic schools of Brothers, of Sisters, where they are teaching nothing less than sin! In practice, they are corrupting children from their tenderest years. And you are going to put up with that! It is not possible. Better that your children be poor, better that your children be far from all that apparent knowledge which the world possesses, but that they be good children, Christian children, Catholic children, children who love their holy religion, who love to pray and who love work, who love the nature that God made!³⁶³

3. What is a Catholic school?

A Catholic school is a school where a person learns discipline, where a person learns sacrifice, because we cannot be Catholic without sacrificing ourselves. Why sacrifice ourselves? In order to be filled with charity and love. We were created to love God and

³⁶¹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 27, 1975.

³⁶² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, April 6, 1988.

³⁶³ Sermon, Paris, September 23, 1979.

to love our neighbor. That is the whole law of God. There is no other. In the Gospel, the entire law is contained in charity. But to become charitable, we have to sacrifice ourselves. If we do not sacrifice ourselves, we cannot devote ourselves, we cannot give ourselves. Someone who is selfish, who only thinks of himself, is not charitable. At a Catholic school, a person learns to sacrifice himself, to discipline himself: to discipline his intelligence, to discipline his will, to discipline his heart.

A person learns to discipline his intelligence by receiving the truth and submitting to it.

A person learns to form, to discipline his will. Everyone has his defects; the effects of original sin follow us to our death. So we have to struggle against these evil tendencies, these evil desires which are in us, and to discipline our will with the help of God, with the help of grace. That is why the chapel is the heart, the principal building of the school. Everything in the school is oriented toward the chapel, toward our Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who is our truth, our strength, our love.³⁶⁴

4. IN THE SCHOOL OF THE HOLY FAMILY

1. *The life of Jesus within a family*

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!

³⁶⁴ Sermon, Montréal de l'Aude, March 31, 1982.

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 for their Heavenly mission as well.³⁶⁵

2. *A simple story and a perfectly true story*

At the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, in Jerusalem, the Blessed Virgin says to Him explicitly, "*In sorrow Thy father and I have been seeking Thee.*" And our Lord answered them, "*Did you not know that I must be about My heavenly Father's business?*" The Evangelist adds, "*And they did not understand the word that He spoke to them.*" (Cf. Lk. 2:48-50) We could think that the most Blessed Virgin would have understood the meaning right away. She certainly understood it afterwards, but right then, in her sorrow, she did not understand: *Non intellexerunt verbum istud.*

This shows that the story of our Lord is a true story. It did not happen as in a dream, where the Blessed Virgin was always with the angels, where all she had to do was pray, where the angels served our Lord at meals. Not at all! The story of the Holy Family is that of a couple with a child, where the father and the mother are working to raise their child, to care for Him, to earn money to buy food to eat. It is a very simple story. Obviously St. Joseph and the most Blessed Virgin had particular graces, but we must not make a kind of romanticized story out of it, which would make people think that everything happened as in a world other than our own.

Our Lord had all of the angels at His disposal. So it would not have been difficult for Him to have an angel come and tell St. Joseph and the most Blessed Virgin Mary that He was in the Temple. The angel could have taken them by the hand to lead them there and tell them, "Here is your Son." It would not have been difficult for our Lord, but He did not will it to be so. He willed to live as much as possible like us, and He permitted that the most Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph suffer because of Him.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Sermon, Ecône, January 8, 1989, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 346-347.

³⁶⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 28, 1976, 9th conference.

3. *A model to imitate*

It is in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, in the atmosphere of the Holy Family, that spouses will discover the secret of a stable and happy union; that they will practice mutual support, daily cooperation; that they will offer to their children and to society the example of a life where the body is subject to reason, reason to the soul and the soul to God, carrying out in themselves, by the grace of our Lord, the designs of God for humanity. May they love to repeat this expression of St. Paul, “*May the Lord renew me as one whom He has created in justice and holiness of truth*” (cf. Eph. 4:24), until the day their union, grown stronger with the years, finds in God its total fulfillment for eternity.³⁶⁷

5. FAMILY LIFE

1. *Piety in the family*

Archbishop Lefebvre bases himself on what he knew in his childhood to suggest to Christian families how to create an atmosphere that fosters the practice of family virtues in the home.

People used to read a great deal in the home and especially during the long winter evenings. Everyone gathered around the fireplace and we read *Cottage Evenings*, for example, a Catholic review, profoundly Christian, which presented many saints' lives with the examples of their virtues. It was encouraging for families. It was another atmosphere than we have today with the television. That is the atmosphere our tertiaries³⁶⁸ have to try to reintroduce into their families in order to create in their home a sanctuary where God dwells, where the charity of the Holy Spirit dwells, also, and so to create that atmosphere of charity which ought to unite the members of a family.³⁶⁹

If Christian families want our Lord to stay in their home, they have to maintain the spirit of the Church, that is, a spirit of prayer and simplicity, and not seek the spirit of the world, and not attach

³⁶⁷ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 11, 1950; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 21.

³⁶⁸ The Archbishop is speaking to members of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Pius X.

³⁶⁹ Sermon, Ecône, September 3, 1988.

themselves to the things of this world.³⁷⁰

Let us love to pray as a family. We see so many sad examples in this domain! How many receive from God their daily bread without asking Him the grace of good measure in its use, and without thanking Him! May every head of a family bring back into honor this custom which is so edifying for the children, so pleasing to God, so filled with benedictions for the home! How can we be surprised that God pursues us with His vengeance and His just anger when He looks in vain to find sentiments of gratitude for the benefits which He grants us?³⁷¹

Good fathers and mothers of families reveal God through their works, through their life. The holiness of the Church is seen in these Christian families where everyone gathers to pray in the morning or the evening, where they go to Mass together, where they pray to the Lord, where they even recite the rosary as a family. Those are clear manifestations of holiness which are produced by our Lord Jesus Christ, since He is the one who is the source of all those graces.³⁷²

Christian families, consecrate your families to the heart of Jesus, to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Pray as a family. Oh! I know that many of you do so, but may there always be more and more who do so with fervor. May our Lord truly reign in your homes!³⁷³

2. *Family virtues*

All of the generations of those holy fathers and mothers of families, who suffered as Christians, who accepted their sufferings with joy, who were an example for their children, really understood what the Christian life is. They bore their sufferings and their difficulties with our Lord Jesus Christ. And those generations of Christian families were a favorable ground for vocations. Vocations are born from the example of parents. Children have seen their parents live with our Lord Jesus Christ, suffer with our Lord Jesus Christ, pray with our Lord Jesus Christ, assist at the

³⁷⁰ Sermon, Ecône, July 14, 1985.

³⁷¹ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 17, 1952; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 34.

³⁷² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 24, 1976, 2nd conference.

³⁷³ Sermon, Paris, September 23, 1979.

Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with that faith, with that piety, offering themselves in oblation as victims with our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁷⁴

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.³⁷⁵

6. PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

May young people understand the nobility of marriage and may they prepare themselves for it worthily through purity, chastity, through prayer, through reflection. May they not let themselves be dragged along by all those passions which put the world in turmoil.³⁷⁶

Now you see can what we have to do to give marriage back all its dignity.

"To the proximate preparation of a good married life," writes our Holy Father Pope Pius XI, "belongs very specially the care in choosing a partner... Those about to enter into wedlock should carefully deliberate in choosing the person with whom henceforward they must live continually... Let them not omit to ask the prudent advice of their parents."³⁷⁷

Moreover, 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

³⁷⁴ Sermon, Ecône, September 14, 1975; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 69.

³⁷⁵ Sermon, Ecône, January 8, 1989, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 347.

³⁷⁶ Sermon, Paris, September 23, 1979.

³⁷⁷ Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, December 31, 1930, §115; Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 11, 1950; cf. *Pastoral Letters: 1947-1968*, p. 20.

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.³⁷⁸ He spoke of the importance of the sacrament of marriage, of the role of 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.³⁷⁹

7. GOOD FAMILIES: A PLEDGE OF HOPE

Christian families, you represent the Church, be convinced of it. Your families contain a wellspring of supernatural faith, of graces, of blessings of God, which is absolutely evident. So it is a great hope; I would even say it is the only hope; I see no other.

It is therefore you, dear Christian parents, who are truly the wellspring of the Church, and we congratulate you. Continue. For pity's sake, continue. Take it to heart to give your children the profoundly Christian formation which you yourselves received.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ Fr. Eugène Loizeau (1907-1964) was the private secretary of the Bishop of Luçon. Beginning in 1946 he directed an organization for marriage-preparation retreats.

³⁷⁹ Conference to deacons, April 12, 1976, in *Priestly Holiness*, pp. 344-345.

³⁸⁰ Sermon, Ecône, Confirmation, May 26, 1985.

8. THE SACRAMENTS: GIFTS FROM HEAVEN

In conclusion to this chapter, we see Archbishop Lefebvre cast a final admiring glance on the sacraments, which procure so many benefits to souls that are well disposed.

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!³⁸¹

How God has done all things well! And how we ought to thank Him for using things of the senses, which are the matter of the sacraments, to signify His grace! We need that. We are not only spirits, we also have a body and we need to use our senses to venerate the things that God has made. By the intermediary of these material things, we can raise ourselves even to the intimacy of the divinity of the most Holy Trinity.³⁸²

³⁸¹ Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 323.

³⁸² Sermon, Ecône, April 22, 1979.

IV

THE VIRGIN MARY

Mary holds such a place in the work of mankind's salvation through the Incarnate Word, that she deserves a very special mention.³⁸³

1.

THE PREDESTINATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

1. THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE PLAN OF GOD

It is not only at the moment of her birth into the world that God thought of exempting the most Blessed Virgin Mary from all sin and making of her the Immaculate Conception. From all eternity, before the creation of the world, the Blessed Virgin was conceived in the mind of God. The Church applies this passage of Scripture to the Blessed Virgin: "*From eternity... I was already conceived*" (*Prov.* 8:23-24). God was already thinking of her, and He willed to shower her with all His graces and to give her that extraordinary privilege of the Immaculate Conception, exempting her from all fault: "You are all beautiful, O Mary, and there is no stain in you."³⁸⁴ So already, from all eternity, God was thinking of this admirable creature, the first after our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 73; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 56.

³⁸⁴ Hymn *Tota Pulchra Es* (cf. *Cant.* 4:7)

³⁸⁵ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1977.

2. THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God revealed little by little the place which He intended to give to the Blessed Virgin in the plan of salvation by announcing her Himself and by prefiguring her through illustrious women of the Old Testament.

Throughout the Old Testament, we can see that God was thinking of the Blessed Virgin. Already, immediately after the sin of Adam and Eve, God said to the serpent, “I will put enmities between thee and the woman;... she shall crush thy head” (Gen. 3:15). So the Virgin Mary was already present in the mind of God.

We can also recognize figures of the most Blessed Virgin Mary in the holy women of the Old Testament. The story of Judith is an announcement of who the most Blessed Virgin Mary would be. Judith delivered the people of Israel by cutting off the head of Holophernes (*Jdt.* 13:9-10). So also the most Blessed Virgin Mary saved the people of God by cutting off the head of the devil, in a way.

Therefore, throughout history, God willed that we be given representations of the most Blessed Virgin Mary. She was always present to God. And so it is that she was exempted from all fault, at her conception.

And if she was filled with the Holy Spirit from her birth, she was so even more, if possible, in the instant when the angel Gabriel came to announce that she would be the Mother of the Savior. “Hail, full of grace” (*Lk.* 1:28), that is what the angel Gabriel said to the most Blessed Virgin Mary; “the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee” (*Lk.* 1:35).³⁸⁶

2.

MOTHER OF GOD AND MOTHER OF MEN

1. MOTHER OF GOD

The Virgin Mary had exceptional interactions with the most Holy Trinity. She is the Mother of the Incarnate

³⁸⁶ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1972.

1. Mary's free acceptance

It is always good for us to re-read the Gospel narrative, which is so simple, about the maternity of Mary, that event for which the world was created. Whether in St. Luke or St. Matthew, its telling is of a great simplicity and strikingly noble at the same time.

"The angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.'" (Lk. 1:26-28) The Church was to base Herself on those words to affirm the Immaculate Conception and the holiness of the most Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is full of grace. So we cannot imagine a fullness of grace greater than hers in any creature, besides the fullness of grace of our Lord. She owes this fullness to her divine maternity.

"Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said to her: 'Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.'" (Lk. 1:29-30) Mary is the only creature who found grace with God.

"Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Lk. 1:31-33) I think that, from that moment, the Virgin Mary, who had certainly meditated on the Scriptures and who was filled with the Holy Spirit, grasped right away that he was speaking of the Messiah, that he was speaking of Him whom humanity had been awaiting for centuries and centuries.

"And Mary said to the angel: 'How shall this be done, because I know not man?' And the angel answering, said to her: 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: because no word shall be impossible with God.' And

³⁸⁷ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 35, a. 4.

Mary said: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her." (Lk. 1:34-38)

In those few words of such simplicity we find all the mystery of the coming to earth of God Himself, of the Word Incarnate. The Gospel describes it in a few lines with such simplicity, but at the same time such grandeur, such nobility, that we are speechless. We are stupefied to see how all that is so great and so simple at the same time, understandable to everyone. Anyone can read that narrative and enter into this great mystery of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁸⁸ The most Blessed Virgin Mary truly became at that moment the Mother of Incarnate Wisdom.³⁸⁹

2. The mystery

In St. Luke, the angel Gabriel said to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, "*Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, Filius Altissimi vocabitur, and shall be called the Son of the most High*" (Lk. 1:31-32), that is to say, Son of God. St. Elizabeth confirms it when the most Blessed Virgin Mary comes to visit her: "*And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord,*" that is, the mother of my God, "*should come to me?*" (Lk. 1:43) And the Church was to confirm that truth at the Council of Ephesus by these words: "If anyone does not confess that the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God, let him be anathema."³⁹⁰ We have to confess that the most Blessed Virgin is truly the Mother of God because she is the mother of a person. There is only one Person in Jesus, there are not two. She is not the mother only of the body, she is the mother of a person. The child who came from her womb and whom she brought into the world in the stable of Bethlehem is a person and it is her Son. So it is difficult for us to measure the dignity of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁹¹

The greatest, the most beautiful privilege of the Blessed Virgin is her divine maternity. The more we reflect on it, the more dumbstruck we are before this truly incredible mystery. As the

³⁸⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 30, a. 4.

³⁸⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 10, 1982, 12th conference.

³⁹⁰ *Si quis non confitetur Dei Genitricem sanctam Virginem, anathemata sit*, DS 252; DZ 113. The Council of Ephesus took place in the year 431.

³⁹¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 27, 1984, 12th conference.

blessed Grignon de Montfort said, the Incarnate Wisdom could have come “glorious and triumphant, accompanied by millions and millions of angels, or at least by millions of chosen men and women,”³⁹² with a tremendous army, wealth, possessions, and so on. We might have imagined anything; but that He should come in the womb of the Virgin Mary, that He should come down to earth by that means and give Himself a mother, and that He should give her to each one of us, is something absolutely unheard of. What a privilege for Mary to have been chosen, an incredible privilege!³⁹³

The Virgin Mary can definitely say in her *Magnificat*, “*He that is mighty hath done great things to me*” (Lk. 1:49). Yes, indeed, He willed to dwell in the womb of the Virgin Mary for nine months. What a grace for that creature chosen in a totally unique manner to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Mother of our Savior!³⁹⁴

3. *The privileges of Mary*

1. The privileges tied to her divine maternity

St. Thomas evokes the great privileges of the Virgin Mary when he speaks of the mission of the Word in this world through His Incarnation.³⁹⁵

We cannot grasp what it means to be the Mother of the Son of God, the Mother of the Incarnate Word. From there flow all of the privileges with which Mary was adorned, first that of being exempted from original sin and consequently of being all pure, all pleasing to God. From the first instant of the awakening of her awareness until the last moment of her life, never did the most Blessed Virgin sin, never did she oppose the will of God. And all that because she was the Mother of Jesus. It is for the same reason that she remained a virgin.³⁹⁶ That is another privilege which God granted her.

Moreover, she participated in the whole life of our Lord and by the very fact was co-redemptrix, that is to say, she shared in the

³⁹² *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. 14, §168.

³⁹³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 10, 1982, 12th conference.

³⁹⁴ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1990.

³⁹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 27-30. *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 73; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 56.

³⁹⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 28, a. 2.

Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, she shared it even to the foot of the cross.³⁹⁷

It is also thanks to her divine maternity that the Blessed Virgin is the Mediatrix of all the graces which are given to us; her spiritual maternity is universal. If Jesus is the head of the Mystical Body, Mary is its neck, as the Fathers of the Church put it.³⁹⁸

2. Mary Co-Redemptrix

Among the privileges of the Virgin Mary, Archbishop Lefebvre has just named the co-redemption. Because of its importance, he often returned to this subject, as we can see from the following texts.

It says explicitly in the Gospel that the Virgin's heart would be pierced by a sword (Lk. 2:35).

That heart pierced by a sword is none other than the symbol of her association with the Passion of her divine Son. And it is likewise stated that the most Blessed Virgin was next to our Lord during His Passion and at the moment of His death.

Stabat Mater juxta Crucem (cf. Jn. 19:25). So we cannot deny that Providence, that God, willed to associate the most Blessed Virgin Mary not only with His birth, with His public life, but especially with His Passion. For if the most important moment, the hour of our Lord Jesus Christ, was the hour of His Passion, was that of His death on the cross, the hour of the most Blessed Virgin Mary was her compassion, her intimate union with the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁹⁹

All His life, our Lord Jesus Christ was haunted by the desire to ascend the cross. That is why our Lord came, and that is what the most Blessed Virgin Mary teaches us. For the Virgin Mary is but the mirror of our Lord Jesus Christ. In her heart there is inscribed no other name than the Name of Jesus and Jesus crucified. The most Blessed Virgin Mary accompanied Him everywhere, even to the sacrifice of the cross. She was present there, as though to teach us that the thing most dear to her was to accompany our Lord to Calvary, to the sacrifice of the cross.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, August 31, 1975.

³⁹⁸ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 74; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 57.

³⁹⁹ Sermon, Ecône, April 10, 1981.

⁴⁰⁰ Sermon, Mariazell, September 8, 1975; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 92.

Whom can we ask what was taking place in the heart of our Lord, in His mind, in His soul, throughout the Passion, from the Garden of Olives, through all of His sufferings, through the way which led Him to Calvary, and on the cross, if not the most Blessed Virgin Mary?

If it is true that, even in nature, it is the mother who sounds the heart of her son and who can guess the thoughts of her son, without need of words, then all the more so did the most Blessed Virgin Mary, she who was next to the cross, with her divine Son, our Lord, try also to sound the thoughts of Jesus, the desires of Jesus, the joys of Jesus, the sufferings of Jesus. It is a great mystery, the mystery of God Himself! Jesus is God. So how could the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who is only a creature, even if she is filled with the Holy Spirit, possibly measure the sentiments of God, the thoughts of God? As Scripture says, "*The Holy Spirit sounds the depths of God.*"⁴⁰¹ Since the most Blessed Virgin Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit, God certainly gave her very special graces to understand why this God was fastened that way to the cross. She who followed Him throughout those thirty-three years, who gave Him life, she was most suited to understand what was happening in the soul of Jesus.⁴⁰²

3. The Assumption and the Coronation of Mary

Finally it remains to consider another privilege of the Blessed Virgin, her rising up to Heaven with her body and her soul.

Since her body was not susceptible to corruption, it was resurrected and rose up to Heaven, and that is the privilege of her Assumption; she is now the Queen of Heaven and earth.⁴⁰³

If there is a subject that raises us up to Heaven, it is certainly the thought of Mary triumphant, Mary glorious, Mary Queen of Heaven.

You remember that, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, at the Ascension, it says that the Apostles stood there with their gaze turned toward Heaven (*Acts* 1:10). Our Lord had disappeared, but they

⁴⁰¹ *Spiritus Sanctus scrutatur profunda Dei* (cf. *1 Cor.* 2:10).

⁴⁰² Conference for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, April 10, 1987; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 92.

⁴⁰³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 74; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 57.

were so subjugated by the sight they had seen that their eyes remained fixed on Heaven, and we can certainly understand why. If we had seen the Assumption of the most Blessed Virgin, our eyes too would have stayed fixed on Heaven, with the hope of one day following our mother. If any creature is truly heavenly, it is definitely the most Blessed Virgin. God gave the proof of it by her Assumption. She is now radiant not only in her soul but in her body also.⁴⁰⁴

4. *Sublimity of the Blessed Virgin*

Each time the most Blessed Virgin willed to appear here on earth, those who had that great grace of seeing her were in admiration before her splendor, before her light, before her radiance, before her heavenly state.

They say that when Bernadette was in that state of ecstasy before the most Blessed Virgin Mary, if somebody put a candle flame to her hand she did not even feel it, so attracted was she by the beauty, by the grandeur, by the sublimity of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴⁰⁵

2. MOTHER OF MEN

Mary by her *fiat* became miraculously the Mother of God, the Mother of the Savior, and by the very fact she became the Mother of His Mystical Body, that is, of all those who were to live the life of Jesus here below and in eternity – the Queen of angels and the ultimate enemy of the devils.

We have become her sons through baptism and we are nourished on her flesh and blood in the Eucharist.⁴⁰⁶ She is truly our spiritual mother.⁴⁰⁷

The most Blessed Virgin is our mother. The best proof is that our Lord on the cross named the most Blessed Virgin as the mother of St. John (*Jn.* 19:26-27). And St. John represented at that moment the entire Mystical Body of our Lord, and therefore ourselves.

⁴⁰⁴ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1990.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ The flesh and the blood of Jesus are named here by extension as the flesh and the blood of His Mother.

⁴⁰⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 73; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 56.

So we are sons of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and through her do we receive all of the graces of the Redemption. Our Lord placed in her hands the treasure of graces of His cross. And the most blessed Virgin Mary makes them pass through the holy Church, as well, mystical Spouse of our Lord. What a tremendous mystery!

Finally, this is also the reason why the most Blessed Virgin was present at Pentecost in the midst of the Apostles. Pope Pius XII says explicitly that it was through the mediation of the most Blessed Virgin, she who was filled with the Holy Spirit, that the Apostles themselves received the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰⁸ The most Blessed Virgin Mary is therefore our mother, and she is our model. And so by the grace of God we shall follow her even in her Assumption, meaning in the resurrection of our bodies.⁴⁰⁹

3.

MARIAN DEVOTION

1. ITS NECESSITY

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 the good 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.⁴¹⁰

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 can we imagine that we ourselves, poor sinful creatures, have no need of Mary's powerful help to form in us the Christian

⁴⁰⁸ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943.

⁴⁰⁹ Sermon, Ecône, August 31, 1975.

⁴¹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, January 15, 1987, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 290.

and the priest?⁴¹¹

He chose the Blessed Virgin to be His mother and by the very fact our mother, because she is the Mother of Jesus and mother of all of the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus. A child who pushes away his mother and says, "I don't need a mother," is a renegade, a child who goes against nature. So devotion to the Blessed Virgin is not optional, it is absolutely indispensable for our sanctification.⁴¹²

We have to thank God 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 her? So let us rejoice to see this mother in heaven by whom we receive all graces.⁴¹³

2. TRUE AND FALSE DEVOTION

The Blessed Virgin in her kindness can certainly come to encourage us on the road to Heaven, as she did at Lourdes, at Fatima, at La Salette, and in many other apparitions. The Blessed Virgin has shown herself very generous in coming often to encourage us. But what did she say? Very simple things. She repeated what our Lord said. We have to do penance, we have to pray, we have to obey God, we have to receive Communion with devotion. She merely repeated what our Lord had said. Obviously, coming from the Blessed Virgin, those are encouragements, and we need them. The Blessed Virgin knows our weakness and the misery of the world. So she has come to visit us the most often possible in order to save souls. And thanks to those apparitions, many souls have returned to the faith. Through the miracles of Lourdes, for example, many souls have returned to the faith.

But we have to avoid letting ourselves be drawn by stories of apparitions or messages, in the critical sort of times we are living

⁴¹¹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 11, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 33; cf. *Spiritual Journey* p. xi.

⁴¹² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 27, 1984, 12th conference.

⁴¹³ Sermon, Ecône, January 15, 1987, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 290.

today. We should not go looking in little magazines for the declarations of people who have supposedly received a message from the most Blessed Virgin, who told them such and such a thing. Some people feed their spirituality that way to such an extent that, if they were not constantly being stimulated by that kind of thing, they would feel as though they had no spiritual life.

So we have to be careful not to let ourselves be caught up in a kind of religious sentimentalism. We cannot base our religion on sentiment, but on principles of spirituality which do not come from us. If we have objective principles, then we stay faithful to God in adversity. Unfortunately, we too often judge our spirituality based on our feelings. But prayer is not primarily on the level of the senses. Prayer is on the spiritual level. That God should grant us some sensible satisfactions in our prayer is God's business. He does it to encourage us. But prayer consists in raising our soul toward God and not our eyes, not our arms... Devotion cannot depend on the rhythm of our heartbeat, or else we are unhappy as soon as we don't feel any more fervor. We don't know how to pull ourselves out of it, we complain, and soon we lose the faith, soon we lose everything.

So, today more than ever, we need a piety that rests on solid foundations, such as our Lord gave to us and illustrated through His saints.⁴¹⁴

3. IN WHAT DOES TRUE DEVOTION CONSIST?

Blessed Grignon de Montfort advises as a means of acquiring divine Wisdom "a loving and genuine devotion to the Blessed Virgin."⁴¹⁵ True devotion is loving because the Blessed Virgin is our spiritual mother, and a devotion to a mother is always tender, that is to say delicate, thoughtful, affectionate. But it will only be genuine if it is based on sure principles and not on imagination; on evident realities and not on hypotheses or feelings.⁴¹⁶

Blessed de Montfort also describes true devotion to Mary: "If I were asked by someone seeking to honor our Lady, 'What does

⁴¹⁴ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 8th conference.

⁴¹⁵ *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. 17, §203.

⁴¹⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 27, 1984, 12th conference.

genuine devotion to her involve? I would answer briefly that it consists in a full appreciation of the privileges and dignity of our Lady; in expressing our gratitude for her goodness to us; in zealously promoting devotion to her; in constantly appealing for her help; in being completely dependent on her; and in placing firm reliance and loving confidence in her motherly goodness."⁴¹⁷

4. A FEW DEVOTIONS

1. *The holy rosary*

1. Origin and beauty of the rosary

The rosary did not exist in the first centuries in the form it has today, but holy souls certainly must have repeated the words of the archangel Gabriel when they prayed to the most Blessed Virgin: "*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb*" (Lk. 1:18).⁴¹⁸

In his *Apostolic Letter* of September 29, 1961, honoring the praying of the rosary, Pope John XXIII said, "O blessed rosary of Mary, what sweetness in seeing you pass slowly through the hands of the innocent, of holy priests, of pure souls, of young and old alike, of all those who appreciate the value and the efficacy of prayer, brandished by countless multitudes of the pious as an emblem and a standard announcing peace in hearts and peace for all men." Do we truly appreciate that value and that efficacy of prayer?⁴¹⁹

2. The victories of the rosary

We receive grace through prayer and most particularly through our kind mother in Heaven. The feast of the Holy Rosary reminds us of the combats of the most Blessed Virgin against the enemies of the Church.⁴²⁰

The most Blessed Virgin willed to make known her presence in the holy Church throughout the course of history, alongside

⁴¹⁷ *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. 17, §215. Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 10, 1982, 12th conference.

⁴¹⁸ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 10, 1982, 12th conference.

⁴¹⁹ Pastoral Letter, Dakar, February 2, 1962, in *Lettres Pastorales et Ecrites*, p. 155.

⁴²⁰ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 7, 1982.

those who were fighting to maintain the Catholic faith. She made it known through the proclamation of her divine maternity against the Arians. She made it known through St. Dominic. The Albigensians were conquered thanks to the recitation of that exceptional prayer which is the rosary. And a little later, it is again on this feast of the Holy Rosary that the Church evokes the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary at the victory of Lepanto against the Moslems, thanks to the praying of the rosary.⁴²¹

It is also she who drove the Moslems out of Hungary during the time of Pope Clement XI.⁴²² She is stronger than armies, because she pushes back the enemy.⁴²³

And we could also say that the most Blessed Virgin Mary appeared at Lourdes, at la Salette, at Fatima, throughout this modern age, to fight against errors, to fight in particular against modernism and communism. She said so explicitly. So the most Blessed Virgin Mary will be an example for you.⁴²⁴

3. The rosary: A formidable weapon

The rosary is our weapon. It needs to be our weapon against the devil, against Satan. The magnificent examples brought about through the recitation of the rosary and which history has passed down to us should invite you to recite it often, and all fifteen decades if you can. So entrust yourself to the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴²⁵

I hope that you all have your rosary with you and that you recite your rosary every day, that you pray to our kind mother in Heaven to keep you in the Catholic faith.⁴²⁶

When you feel yourself being tempted, when you feel discouraged in difficulties, in trials, take up your rosary and recite it. Ask the Virgin Mary, our kind mother in Heaven, to come to your help and you will see how the rosary is a powerful prayer. In apparitions, the most Blessed Virgin has always come with her rosary in her hand, to show us how attached she is to that prayer.

⁴²¹ Sermon, Ecône, October 11, 1981.

⁴²² 6th lesson of matins for October 7th.

⁴²³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 7, 1982.

⁴²⁴ Sermon, Ecône, October 11, 1981.

⁴²⁵ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 7, 1982.

⁴²⁶ Sermon, Shawinigan, May 2, 1982.

At Fatima, she begged us to pray and to do penance. She took the rosary herself and taught the little children of Fatima to recite the rosary with her, for the salvation of souls, so they might save their soul and that of their neighbor.⁴²⁷

Go to Mary, address yourselves to her. She will give you Jesus, that light which will illuminate your souls. You will ask her to help you understand better the great mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ and she will make you participate in the love which she has for her divine Son.⁴²⁸

2. *Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

The heart of the most Blessed Virgin Mary is necessary in our times to maintain us in the faith. We need to feel the warmth of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ for us. Since we do not have it before our eyes, we sense a need to feel that the Virgin Mary is next to us.

And that is why she asked, at Fatima, that we pray to her Immaculate Heart. We need the divine affection which floods her heart and we also need her Immaculate Heart, her heart without stain, without sin.⁴²⁹

3. *Wearing the scapular of Mount Carmel*

The prophet Elias lived for many long years in solitude, in a grotto on Mount Carmel in Palestine, that place which dominates the sea of Haifa from fifteen hundred feet above sea level, in a location privileged for its beauty and silence.

During the crusades, priests decided to gather on Mount Carmel, where, protected by the crusaders, they might lead a life of solitude and recollection in the image of the prophet Elias. Those Carmelites placed themselves under the protection of our Lady of Mount Carmel. The Blessed Virgin would reward them for it later. But those religious must have disappeared at the end of that century, just like many others who accompanied the crusaders during the 13th century. Many were martyred, massacred in the Moslem invasion. But already a certain number of them had taken refuge in Europe. There they spread throughout the 14th and

⁴²⁷ Sermon, confirmation, Ecône, May 14, 1989.

⁴²⁸ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

⁴²⁹ Sermon, Ecône, August 22, 1976.

15th centuries, but with many difficulties, because the bishops and the religious orders which already existed considered that there was no more room for an order as large as theirs and which was spreading so rapidly. Nonetheless, the order was able to survive because of the approval of the popes and especially because of St. Simon Stock. That English Carmelite received an apparition of the most Blessed Virgin on the night of July 15th to 16th, 1251, during which she showed him the scapular of Mount Carmel and told him that people who died vested in the scapular would go to Heaven, and if they had to pass through purgatory they would be brought up to Heaven on the Saturday after their death.⁴³⁰ This devotion spread rapidly throughout Europe.

So, since the Blessed Virgin told us that if we wore the scapular or the medal of the scapular of Mount Carmel, we would go to Heaven, let us wear the scapular of Mount Carmel, so that God might fulfill His promises and so that after our death we might be carried up to be with the most Blessed Virgin, in the heart of the Holy Trinity.⁴³¹

4. *The consecration to Jesus and Mary*

St. Louis Grignion de Montfort says that “the most perfect and most profitable of all devotions to the Blessed Virgin consists in consecrating ourselves entirely to her, and to Jesus through her, as their slaves. It involves consecrating to her completely and for all eternity our body and soul, our possessions both spiritual and material, the atoning value and the merits of our good actions and our right to dispose of them. In short, it involves the offering of all we have acquired in the past, all we actually possess at the moment, and all we will acquire in the future.

“This devotion, if well practiced, not only draws Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, into our soul, but also makes it agreeable to Him and He remains there to the end of our life. For, I ask you, what would be the good of searching for secrets of finding divine Wisdom and of making every effort to possess this treasure, if after acquiring it, we were, like Solomon, to have the misfortune to lose

⁴³⁰ Three conditions are required in order to benefit from this privilege: wear the scapular regularly, keep chastity according to one’s state in life, and recite daily the little office of the Blessed Virgin (or the rosary).

⁴³¹ Sermon, Ecône, July 14, 1985.

it by our unfaithfulness?"⁴³²

Those are the thoughts of Fr. de Montfort. He composed his own consecration to the Blessed Virgin and I certainly would advise you to follow his method.⁴³³

5. THE BLESSED VIRGIN: A MODEL TO IMITATE

The most Blessed Virgin Mary had a loving heart for our Lord Jesus Christ alone and for those who were attached to Him, and finally for all of the souls to be led to her Son Jesus. She lived on that love. And because she loved our Lord, she could never offend Him. She was conceived immaculate and she remained so all her life.⁴³⁴

Let us strive to obtain, in some way, through the grace of God, through our prayers and through our efforts, what the most Blessed Virgin Mary held perfectly through the anticipated application of the merits of our Lord. Let us become in a certain way immaculate souls in order to receive in Holy Communion the body of our Lord which was conceived in her.⁴³⁵

The Blessed Virgin is therefore for us a model of purity of heart and a model of obedience to the law of our Lord Jesus Christ. And because she loved our Lord, she willed to share with Him His sufferings. She saw her Son suffer and she willed to suffer with Him. When the heart of Jesus was pierced, so also was hers. These two pierced hearts lived in unison only for the glory of God, for the reign of God, for the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. They beat only for that.

That is why we, too, ought to be ready to suffer for the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴³⁶

The Virgin Mary had only one thought, only one love: her divine Son. She never desired anything but the reign of her divine Son. She still shows that to be true in her apparitions here below. So ask her to give you a little of her knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, she who possessed it in so magnificent a manner, since she

⁴³² *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. 17, §219-220.

⁴³³ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 10, 1982, 12th conference.

⁴³⁴ Sermon, Ecône, August 22, 1976.

⁴³⁵ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1972.

⁴³⁶ Sermon, Ecône, August 22, 1976.

was filled with the Holy Spirit. Ask her to make you participate in her knowledge in order to make you participate also in her love for our Lord and for His reign.⁴³⁷

We have to have the names of Jesus and Mary written in our hearts in letters of gold. And we have to guard them preciously within us in order that, wherever we go during our life, these names might be our joy, our happiness, our peace, and the solution to all our problems.⁴³⁸

6. THE FAMILY OF MARY AND THE FAMILY OF SATAN

“I will put enmities between thee, Satan, who lied to Eve and led her with Adam into sin, and the woman,” that is, the Blessed Virgin, *“and between thy descendants and hers”* (cf. Gen. 3:15). And so God foresaw all the history of humanity. From then on there would be a family of Mary and a family of Satan.

God already saw those who would attach themselves to Satan, those who would follow his principles and his suggestions, who would subject themselves to him over the course of the history of the world, and those who would be of the family of the Virgin Mary. Certainly, when God spoke those words, *“and her descendants,” et semen illius*, He was thinking of Jesus Christ, who would obviously be the first descendant of the Virgin. But in Him and through Him we are all meant to become sons of God. So we have to be a part of the family of the Virgin Mary if we want to stand against the family of Satan and not fall under his influence.

The first person who was exempted from the domination of Satan was the Virgin Mary. And so began a family which would not be under the influence of Satan. We of course did not have that privilege, because we were born dominated by Satan. But precisely through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the grace which the most Blessed Virgin Mary transmits to us at baptism, by all of the graces which we receive, we have to conquer our title as sons of God.

Nonetheless, we have to say it, those two families are not separated definitively. They are mixed together over the course of this trial which is life on earth.

⁴³⁷ Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1987.

⁴³⁸ Sermon, Ecône, August 31, 1975.

The members of the family of the Virgin Mary and those of the family of Satan are inside the same houses, in the same institutions, in the same countries, in the same regions. We pass each other in the street, we meet, we speak together. So who will remain of the family of the Virgin Mary? Will we know how to protect our character as sons of God in the middle of this depraved world?

That is why the Church, of which Mary is the mother, has always willed that throughout Her history, through the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, there be a particular line made up of priests, of monks, of religious who would show clearly by their life, by their fidelity to the virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there does exist a family of the Virgin Mary, that this family is powerful, that this family is alive. And it is an example which carries the faithful along, carries Christians along, and maintains them in their title as children of God.⁴³⁹

7. LIVING IN COMPANY WITH THE BLESSED VIRGIN

We have to live in company with the most Blessed Virgin Mary. It is good to reflect and to make a little examination of conscience, to ask ourselves, "What would the Virgin Mary think if she were present right now next to me? What would she think of what I am doing, of what I am saying, of what I am thinking, of what I am choosing to love?" May we allow the most Blessed Virgin Mary to be always with us wherever we are. Let us live with her. May she not be obliged to leave us because she cannot accept what we are doing or what we are loving. That is the resolution we have to take. That is how we can fulfill the desire which the Church expresses in Her collect for the day of the Assumption: that we be always turned toward Heaven.

What will the most Blessed Virgin Mary teach us? She will teach us to be holy as she is, to be pure as she is, to love God as she loved Him, and above all to love her Son Jesus Christ. She will teach us that there is no other God than our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom dwell the Father and the Holy Spirit. That above all is the great lesson which the most Blessed Virgin Mary gives us. And it is very important today because our Lord is set aside. He is put on the same level as the founders of all the religions. The most

⁴³⁹ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1977.

Blessed Virgin Mary cannot endure that; it is impossible.⁴⁴⁰

As the Blessed Virgin was, I would say, the contrary, the contradictory of sin, it is impossible to think of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and to think of sin. She is the creature who was thought of by God and made by God in order to destroy sin. In the Virgin Mary, there is no compromise with sin, no compromise with error. She is entirely true, she is entirely holy. She cannot suffer error nor sin nor vice.⁴⁴¹

She is not liberal, or modernist, or ecumenical. She is allergic to all errors and all the more so to heresies and apostasy.⁴⁴²

For her, there is only our Lord Jesus Christ, her divine Son, who is the way, the truth and the life; who is the path to go to Heaven. There is no other. She came in order to give Him to the world; she was chosen for that.

So let us ask the Virgin Mary to be truly our mother, to take us by the hand, to lead us throughout this earthly life so that one day we too might share her glory in Heaven.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1990.

⁴⁴¹ Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1972.

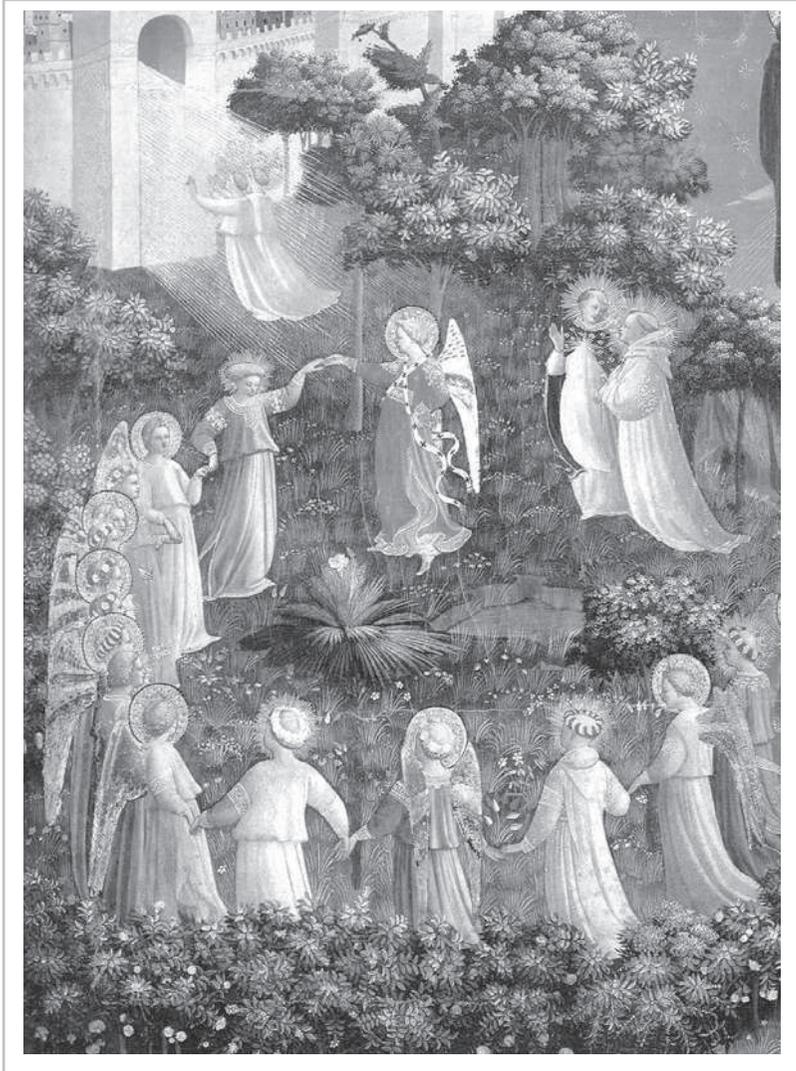
⁴⁴² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 74; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 57.

⁴⁴³ Sermon, Ecône, August 15, 1990.

Book Four

OUR DESTINY: ETERNAL LIFE





Heaven, in Fra Angelico's "Last Judgment."

OUR DESTINY: ETERNAL LIFE

We shall end now with a meditation on God's ultimate charity for us. It reaches fulfillment in what we call the four last things. I believe in Jesus Christ who "will come to judge the living and the dead... I believe in the resurrection of the body, in life everlasting."¹ The *Credo* speaks of the last things. And when we read the Gospel it is remarkable how often our Lord speaks of the last things. Obviously above all we need to keep in mind the fact that God wills our salvation, He wills to communicate to us definitively, for ever, His charity and therefore His happiness, His perpetual life. So it is good to remind ourselves of what God has prepared for us in eternity.²

1.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND OF THE CHURCH

1. THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST

We should be extremely interested in the four last things, especially since all of our actions here below are preparing our future eternity. It would be insanity to live in indifference or unawareness of these last things. It is the fundamental motive behind the Incarnation, the Redemption: our return to God through Jesus Christ. It is the essence of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas, because it is the essence of our reason for existing: to be with God for ever.

The sole purpose of all the inspired writings of the New Testament is to focus our attention on obtaining eternal life and to

¹ *Inde venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos... Credo in carnis resurrectionem, vitam æternam.*

² Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

keep us from damnation.³

When we consult the concordance tables of the Gospel, it is startling to see the number of references there are to the four last things. Our Lord spoke of them constantly. We can't say that our Lord didn't warn us, that He didn't draw our attention to the subject; it's not true. Throughout the Gospel of St. Matthew, our Lord is constantly alluding to the last things. He speaks of the prudent and faithful servant, whom his master established over his household to distribute their nourishment in due time. *"Amen I say to you, he will set him over all his goods. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master delays his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day he does not expect, and in an hour he does not know, and will cut him asunder and make him share the lot of the hypocrites. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."* (Mt. 24:47-51) That expression, *"there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth,"* appears six times in St. Matthew.

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25:13). On the same topic, we often hear the Gospel at Mass of the foolish virgins and the wise virgins. The foolish virgins come to knock on the door: *"I do not know you"* (Mt. 25:12). What terrible words!

In the parable of the talents, there is the one who buried his talent because he knows that his master is a hard man, whereas in fact his master is simply just. So the servant buried his talent; he did not want to benefit from the graces which God had given him. And so the little which he had received is taken away from him. *"But as for the unprofitable servant, cast him forth into the darkness outside, where there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"* (Mt. 25:30). There it is again!

"But when the Son of Man shall come in His majesty, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Mt. 25:31). This passage does not concern the particular judgment, but the Last Judgment.

"And before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, blessed of

³ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 76; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 58-59.

My Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked and you covered Me; sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the just will answer Him..." (Mt. 25:32-37) You know that parable. And Jesus ends by saying, "Then they also will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to Thee?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Amen I say to you, as long as you did not do it to one of these least ones, you did not do it for Me.' And these will go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting." (Mt. 25:44-46) We could quote pages and pages of our Lord speaking that way.⁴

2. THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

The teaching of the Church on these last things, like the teaching of our Lord, is formal and clear, even though the way they are going to happen remains mysterious.

The certainty of our salvation, the number of the elect and the damned, the way the personal judgment will occur at the moment of our death, the exact nature of purgatory, its duration whereas we are no longer subject to time, the status of the elect before the General Judgment and the resurrection – these are all situations that are still mysterious for us; nonetheless we know, and it is the essential, that the happiness set aside for the elect surpasses anything we can imagine and that hell is a place of atrocious torments.

With the help of St. Thomas, let us try to form a clearer idea of the teaching of the Church on what Providence has planned for us after death.⁵

⁴ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

⁵ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 76; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 59.

2.

DEATH AND THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

1. DEATH

Certainly, ever since divine mercy came to manifest itself among us in the person of the Incarnate Word, countless graces tie the heavenly world to the earthly world; and yet we know that for each one of us, despite the graces of all the sacraments, there remains the consequence of original sin which none of us shall escape: and that is death.

But isn't it true that for Christians the death of our Lord softens the rigor of that pain, of that chastisement? With Him we die, with Him we live; so with Him also we shall live and we shall rise again.⁶

Our soul is immortal. As it says in the preface of the dead, "For unto Thy faithful, O Lord, life is changed not taken away⁷: and the abode of this earthly sojourn being dissolved, an eternal dwelling is prepared in heaven."

Life changes in the sense that it becomes a life without the body for a certain time, as we wait for God to raise the body again, but life is not taken away. The memory, the intellect, the will absolutely remain. When our body is in the earth, our soul will continue to live as it does now. These words are extremely significant. Life is not taken away, it is simply changed. We have to have faith, we have to have hope and entrust ourselves completely to God.

When we are on our death bed, ready to breathe our last, we will have to tell ourselves, "If truly I offer myself to God, my soul will simply change; my body will stay in the earth, but my soul will continue to live."⁸

We do not just stop at the moment of death, as though eve-

⁶ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 75; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 58.

⁷ *Vita mutatur, non tollitur*.

⁸ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 23, 1984, 4th conference.

rything were over after that. We could compare death to the chrysalis leaving the cocoon where it was enclosed and coming out and flying toward the light. That is a little bit what death is. Our soul leaves our body and rises toward the light.⁹

Death therefore makes us pass from this ephemeral world into the spiritual world, for even resurrected bodies are going to be spiritualized: *"It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body"* (1 Cor. 15:44).¹⁰

So let us not be terrified by death, but let us think about death as the delivery of our soul, making it be no longer a slave to our body, but entirely in the hands of God, entirely in joy, in elation – yet only if here below we have fulfilled the law of the Lord.¹¹

Indeed, there are two kinds of death. For as much as the death of the just is to be envied, so much also is that of the sinner to be feared. Archbishop Lefebvre was convinced of it, as the following considerations make clear.

In Heaven, when we finally close our eyes here below, our happiness will be the discovery of all the divine attributes. Then we are going to say to ourselves, "I am with God for eternity. I am with God who has all the qualities, all the riches we could possibly imagine, all the love." We will see the Persons of the Holy Trinity like a sun. On the other hand, the poor people who lived against God are horrified after they leave this world. They say to themselves, "How could I have been against God?" But by then it's over, it's too late. They are immobilized in their evil will and in their disobedience.¹²

Some people have a tendency to think, "Oh! Well, when I'm on my death bed, I will convert, I will think about my eternity, I will think about the salvation of my soul." That is not the way to prepare your eternity.¹³

2. THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

The first thing that will happen after our death is the particular judgment. How is it going to happen, according to what the

⁹ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1977.

¹⁰ *Seminatur corpus animale, surget corpus spirituale.*

¹¹ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1977.

¹² Retreat, Morgon, October 1988.

¹³ Sermon, funeral of Mother Marie-Gabriel, January 30, 1987.

Church and the theologians tell us? It is going to be an illumination of our mind. It is going to make us see clearly, distinctly, whatever we have done of good and evil. We are going to see with certainty that the judgment is the fruit of a deliberate choice, depending on whether we chose God, submission to His will, obedience to His commandments, union with Him by charity; or whether we chose on the contrary to separate ourselves from Him. Obviously, we have to think about that judgment. It is what determines our eternity. It is the most important thing there is. But we have to understand that this judgment is already settled by the person making his choice. It's our Lord who says it: "*He who does not believe is already judged*" (Jn. 3:18). We are the ones preparing our own judgment.¹⁴

St. Thomas, basing himself on the very words of our Lord, considers that souls will go of themselves to the places to which they are destined, according to the state they are in, the way physical bodies move to their proper places, drawn by gravity.¹⁵

Souls separated from bodies go immediately either to hell, alas! or to Heaven, or else to purgatory, without their bodies.¹⁶

Souls in a state of grace and whose charity is perfect go to Heaven, enjoy there immediately the beatific vision, as they await the completion of happiness that will come with the resurrection of the body.

Souls in the state of grace, but whose charity is diminished and imperfect because of their venial sins and who still have to expiate pains due to sins already forgiven, go to purgatory.

Souls still suffering under original sin, but without personal sins, go to limbo, where they are without the vision of God but rejoice in a natural happiness.

Souls in a state of grave sin, empty of charity, go to hell for ever.¹⁷

At the particular judgment, all God is doing is enlightening the soul which appears before Him. "You see," our Lord says,

¹⁴ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

¹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 69, a. 2. *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 77; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

¹⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 77-78; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 60-61.

“you have judged yourself. Here is what you have done, here is what you have determined for yourself. I warned you, I let you know My will through My priests.” In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, our Lord speaks of the evil rich man who is in hell, whereas the poor man Lazarus is in Abraham’s bosom. And the rich man begs that someone warn his brothers that he is suffering, there, in hell (Lk. 16:27-28). “*And Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hearken to them... If they do not hearken to Moses and the Prophets, they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead.’*” (Lk. 16:29, 31)

So we have to reflect deeply on these things and prepare ourselves for this judgment by accomplishing faithfully the commandments of God, by abandoning ourselves to His holy will and by practicing charity.¹⁸

3. WHAT ABOUT CREMATION?

In face of the new practice of cremation, Archbishop Lefebvre reminds us of the traditional doctrine on the subject.

The way the reform modified the prayers of the liturgy of the dead has been a great misfortune for the Church. There was another reform at Vatican II concerning the cremation of bodies.

In the 1917 canon law, it is written that those who in one manner or another expressed the desire that their body be cremated after their death have to be denied a Church burial.¹⁹ And it is written in canon law that even the limbs of a Catholic which are amputated in a hospital must not be burned but buried. You see to what point the Church has a respect, a veneration for limbs that have been sanctified by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But at Vatican II the Church changed that law and it was maybe one of the most abominable things that was done because, from the beginning of Her existence, the Church has wanted us to venerate the bodies that have been sanctified by the sacraments and particularly by baptism and the Eucharist, sanctified by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So, we absolutely reject that abominable practice, which is in

¹⁸ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

¹⁹ Canon 1240, §1.

fact Masonic. Canon law alludes to certain associations which ask that bodies be cremated. And those associations are Masonic. So we wonder how we can have let ourselves be influenced by that kind of organization.

That is why we have to maintain a great respect for the bodies of the dead and bury them the way Christians have always done. We have to have a veneration for the dead and for cemeteries, as well. The upkeep of the tombs of our dead should always be perfect, as a sign of our faith in the resurrection of the body.

Let us live in union with the souls in purgatory and ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was present at the burial of her Son, to give us the love and the respect that she had for the body of her divine Son. Let us ask her to give us respect also for the bodies of those who are dead, those of our friends, of our parents and of the faithful departed.²⁰

3.

THE LAST JUDGMENT

1. THE PRECURSORS

Our Lord teaches us that this world is going to end when God in His almighty wisdom decides that the number of the elect has been completed. Precursory signs will announce that end, the coming of the Antichrist in particular; but no one knows the day nor the hour. God has kept the secret for Himself.

Nonetheless, Holy Scripture and Tradition teach us that this end will happen suddenly, in the blink of an eye, *in ictu oculi*. Then will take place the events that have been foretold; the almighty power of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ will manifest itself in the immediate purification of the souls in purgatory, in the death of those who are witness to these events and the instantaneous purification of their souls, should they need purifying.²¹

²⁰ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

²¹ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 74, a. 8.

At the sound of the trumpet of the angels,²² all of the bodies will rise again,²³ to complete the glory of the elect and to increase the pains of the damned.²⁴

2. THE LAST JUDGMENT

“All judgment the Father has given to the Son” (Jn. 5:22). Our Lord Himself said, “All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Mt. 28:18). And St. Paul clearly states, “We shall all stand at the judgment-seat of Christ; for it is written: ‘to Me every knee shall bend’” (cf. Rom. 14:10-11). “So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in Heaven, on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). It is therefore Jesus who will judge all men, all, all, all, without exception.²⁵ And that is normal. God took the trouble to come down among us. So it cannot be otherwise: the Person who was born of the Virgin Mary must hold every power.²⁶

After the resurrection of the body, our Lord will appear in His glory to carry out the General Judgment,²⁷ which will bring the history of humanity to a final close, glorifying His mystical Spouse, the Church, and all the members of His Mystical Body, drawing them after Him into the heart of the Blessed Trinity for all eternity; but also casting into the outer darkness all those who did not believe in Him or who, during their life, refused the charity of the Holy Spirit by going against the law of charity inscribed in their heart, preferring to follow their passions and their suicidal egotism.²⁸

How will that General Judgment take place? Our Lord said that He would come on the clouds of Heaven to judge the whole world.

The General Judgment is tied to the fact that we live in society. It is normal that society itself be witness to whatever good, whatever evil we have done, and be witness to the great justice of

²² *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 76, a. 2.

²³ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 75, a. 2.

²⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 81; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 64.

²⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 89, a. 6.

²⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 5th conference.

²⁷ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 90, a. 2.

²⁸ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 81; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 64.

God and His great mercy.²⁹ We will see clearly, perfectly, everything that all of these human creatures did that was good, that was evil, and the full justice of God and His full mercy will be brought into the light of day at that moment before the whole world.³⁰

St. Thomas thinks that the General Judgment will be perceived through a particular mental illumination making obvious the sentence applied to each.³¹

We can believe that from that moment onward the elect are going to be luminous, as though enveloped in the nuptial robe, whereas the damned are going to be darkened. The angels will make quick work of gathering the predestined around our Lord and casting His enemies into hell. And so will be completed the return to God through our Lord.³²

Our Lord will then repeat the words that He spoke in the Gospel, “*Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom which I have prepared for you... Go, you cursed, into the fire of everlasting hell*” (Mt. 25:34, 41). That is how our history is going to end, and the history of all humanity. We are all personally concerned to the highest degree. We cannot save the person next to us, and it is not the person next to us who is going to save us. We will have to answer for our own life, for our own soul.³³

Blessed those who will have spent their life making the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary reign in themselves and around themselves, and who will have striven to accomplish always the will of those hearts, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, especially received through the baptism of water, or else through the baptism of blood, or the baptism of desire.

There will be no ecumenism then, no religious liberty, nothing but Catholic Christians, and with them those who converted from false religions.³⁴

²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *IV Sent.* dist. 47, q. 1, a. 1, q. 1, “Each man is an individual person and at the same time a part of the entire human race. He therefore must be the object of a double judgment.”

³⁰ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

³¹ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 87, a. 2 and 3.

³² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 81-82; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 64-65.

³³ Sermon, Ecône, April 15, 1990.

³⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 82; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 65

4.

HELL

Let us not forget that, while God is good, He is also just. His justice is terrible. As St. Paul says, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*"! (Heb. 10:31) When we think of everlasting hell, that place of sufferings, of tortures, of gnashing of teeth, as our Lord said, we cannot help being moved. Terrible are the consequences of the sins of man, terrible on earth, but above all terrible in hell for those who are lost!³⁵

1. THE PAIN OF DAMNATION

Hell consists above all in the separation from God. That is the pain of damnation. That definitive separation from God is something terrible.³⁶

The damned are ripped apart. They have a nature created to love God and their neighbor and they force it to love themselves in a selfish manner. So they break their nature. The tragedy of the damned is in being created to love and refusing to do so, until finally they are fixed in that will not to love. They cannot pass from their state of selfishness to the state of charity. Their will is immobilized, fixed, in that state for ever. The pain of damnation is that separation from God. The damned feel that they are made for God and yet they will not to love Him and not to love their neighbor.³⁷

2. THE FIRE OF HELL

Our Lord speaks very often of the everlasting fire. So the theologians have wondered what that fire was. You can look in the "Technical Notes" of the little volume on *The World of the Risen*, in the supplement of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas.

³⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 23, 1984, 4th conference.

³⁶ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Albano, September 25, 1976, 4th conference.

³⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 6, 1974.

The fire of hell is “an instrument of torture which will not destroy but which will endure without end. He who has called his brother a fool is worthy ‘of the fire of Gehenna’ (Mt. 5:22). The fire of hell is eternal (Mt. 18:8-9). It is the perpetual chastisement of the accursed: ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire’ (Mt. 25:41), says our Lord. These thoughts, expressed so many times in the New Testament then taken up by the Fathers, give ultimate expression to the fate of the damned: they are delivered over to the eternal fire.

“The Athanasian Creed has merely recorded that common opinion: ‘they that have done evil shall go into everlasting fire.’ The other official documents of the Church which allude to the pain of the damned speak only of the chastisements, of the infernal torments: they do not define the nature of this fire.”³⁸

In any case, that fire will torture the souls, which will have the impression of being constantly burned by a fire which surrounds them, which comes from within them, from their own depths, because of that hatred they have for God.³⁹

3. THE REGRET OF EVIL IN THE DAMNED

Fr. Réginald-Omez, commenting St. Thomas, writes, “The regret which the damned may have of the evil which they have done is in itself inspired only by its painful consequences, by the chastisement which they undergo, but not by a rectification of the will toward the evil action inasmuch as it is contrary to God. They ‘will not repent of their sins directly, because consent in the malice of sin will remain in them.’⁴⁰ Therefore they have no repentance of the evil accomplished, but only a regret at suffering its consequences. And that regret implies no virtuous rectification of the will. ‘The damned will wickedness, but shun punishment.’⁴¹ Their malice gives rise to envy toward those who do not share their unhappy fate: ‘Envy reigns supreme in the damned,’ says St. Thomas. In them, ‘there will be the most perfect hate’; they ‘grieve for the happiness of the blessed, and desire their damnation... So much the more will

³⁸ R. P. Réginald-Omez, “Technical Notes,” in *Le Monde des Ressuscités* (*Summa Theologica*, Suppl.), Cerf, Paris, 1961, pp. 495-496.

³⁹ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 98, a. 2.

⁴¹ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 98, a. 2, ad 1.

their hatred and envy increase,' continues St. Thomas, 'that they will prefer to be more tormented with many rather than less tormented alone.'"⁴² So they would prefer to suffer even more, as long as there were more people damned along with them.

"This constant paroxysm of hatred is directed at God above all, whom they no longer know except through the chastisement which His justice inflicts upon them. Incapable of perceiving God under His aspect of good, they can only detest Him."⁴³ That is what makes the eternity of their pain: they are immobilized in that hatred of God.⁴⁴

4. THE ETERNITY OF THE PAINS

The eternity of hell is something absolutely certain. So we may wonder how we can explain theologically the eternity of the pains of the damned, and how to reconcile it with the divine mercy. "In conclusion," continues Fr. Réginald-Omez, "the entire theological explanation of the eternity of hell ultimately rests on the fact that with death ceases all possibility for man to correspond with the divine mercy by cooperating freely with a grace of conversion."⁴⁵ The damned refused the divine mercy, they refused the charity of God and they are definitively fixed in their will, so they are no longer able to convert.

"Before death, the mercy of God is limitless, and the conversion of the sinner is always possible. 'It is erroneous to say that any sin cannot be pardoned through true penance.'" First, says St. Thomas, because that would nullify free will; second, because it would deny the power of grace, which is able to lead the heart of any sinner to repentance.⁴⁶

"But, after death, his free will remains fixed in the guilty choice which he made of a final end substituted for God. The impossibility of his conversion then depends purely on that state in

⁴² *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 98, a. 4. Réginald-Omez, "Technical Notes," in *Le Monde des Ressuscités*, pp. 498-499.

⁴³ Réginald-Omez, *ibid.*, p. 499.

⁴⁴ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

⁴⁵ Réginald-Omez, "Technical Notes," in *Le Monde des Ressuscités*, pp. 502-503.

⁴⁶ *Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 86, a. 1. Réginald-Omez, "Technical Notes," in *Le Monde des Ressuscités*, p. 503.

which he has definitively entered, and not on a limit to the divine mercy or the power of grace. For God to be able to forgive the damned, the latter would have to pass through a new trial and turn himself from evil and back to God. Yet, nothing in Revelation nor in the teaching of the Church allows us to entertain that hypothesis, which is contrary to everything we find in the Gospel emphasizing the irrevocability of God's judgment at the hour of death. *'I must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work' (Jn. 9:4).*⁴⁷ It's finished, it's over, souls are fixed forever in their state of rejection of God.⁴⁸

If sin is a radical opposition to God, how can hell be anything but eternal, since in hell are those souls who opposed themselves to God and whom death has petrified in that opposition, fixed irrevocably in that opposition? We cannot imagine a possibility of meeting between these souls and God. *"For the Holy Spirit... will withdraw Himself from thoughts that are without understanding, and He shall not abide when iniquity cometh in"* (Wis. 1:5). We cannot see how the pains of hell could be anything but eternal. It would be contrary to the very holiness of God, to the truth of God. So those souls cannot have the spirit of charity, the spirit of life, the spirit of happiness, the spirit of holiness; it is absolutely impossible. It is horrifying, but that is the way it is.⁴⁹

So hell exists. It consists in horrible pains and it is eternal. And here is the lesson we have to draw from that: the only true evil here below is mortal sin. There is no other. So let us keep in our mind that we have only a limited time to place ourselves in harmony with God, to love Him, to make acts of charity toward Him. We must not be scrupulous, certainly, but we have to be vigilant. That is what our Lord is constantly bringing to our attention: *"Watch, watch, watch! I will come like a thief, when you are least expecting it. So watch."*⁵⁰

5. A THREAT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

God has threatened us with hell for all eternity, if we persist in mortal sin, if we do not wish to leave it and we die in that sin.

⁴⁷ Réginald-Omez, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

⁴⁹ Priests' retreat, Ecône, September 7, 1982, 3rd conference.

⁵⁰ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

People who are in a state of sin and who do not want to leave it, even to their death – it is the most horrible thing that can exist.⁵¹

The little children of Fatima, after the vision of hell, said, “We saw souls going down into hell like leaves falling from the trees in autumn.”⁵² It is horrific. They were terrified. That is why they never stopped saying the rosary all day long and they performed penances as the Blessed Virgin asked them to do. They died young, except for Lucy. They offered their life to keep souls from falling into hell. That is the Catholic faith. We, too, need to pray so that Protestants, so that Moslems, so that Buddhists might convert to our Lord Jesus Christ, who will come on the clouds of heaven to judge them.⁵³

With that kind of horizon before us, in which we have to believe by faith, how can we not shudder like our Lord in His agony in the Garden of Olives, at the thought of all those souls living separated from our Lord, disdaining Him by their indifference, their forgetfulness, their sin, and going straight in the direction of hell?⁵⁴

5.

PURGATORY AND LIMBO

1. THE EXISTENCE OF PURGATORY

1. *A dogma of the faith*

Purgatory is a dogma of the faith. Whoever does not believe in purgatory is a heretic. Indeed, already in the 13th century, the Council of Lyon solemnly affirmed the existence of purgatory.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Retreat for Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 26, 1984, 10th conference.

⁵² Perhaps Archbishop Lefebvre is alluding to this letter of St. Lucy to a seminarian, “Souls are falling into hell like waves of a tempest.” Br. François de Marie des Anges, *Fatima: Joie Intime, Événement Mondial*, CRC, Saint-Parres-lès-Vaudes, 1991, p. 114.

⁵³ Sermon, Montreal, May 12, 1985.

⁵⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 84; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 67.

⁵⁵ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

This is from a letter of Innocent IV: “We indeed, calling it *purgatory* according to the traditions and authority of the Holy Fathers, wish that in the future it be called by that name... For in that transitory fire certainly sins, though not criminal or capital, which before have not been remitted through penance but were small and minor sins, are cleansed, and these weigh heavily even after death, if they have been forgiven in this life.” So there is a purification.⁵⁶

The Council of Florence, in the 15th century, likewise affirmed the reality of purgatory.⁵⁷ Finally, the Council of Trent in particular, reacting to the Protestants’ denial of this dogma by, made a solemn reaffirmation of the necessity of believing in the existence of purgatory.⁵⁸

The decree on purgatory in the Council of Trent, in the 25th session, affirms the following: “Since the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit, in conformity with the sacred writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers in sacred Councils, and very recently in this ecumenical Synod, has taught that there is a purgatory, and that the souls detained there are assisted by the suffrages of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar, the holy Synod commands the bishops that they insist that the sound doctrine of purgatory, which has been transmitted by the holy Fathers and holy Councils, be believed by the faithful of Christ, be maintained, taught, and everywhere preached.”⁵⁹

This reality of purgatory was denied by many heretics over the course of history and the same thing is happening now, more and more. Today we see people in the most Catholic circles affirming that purgatory does not exist, that prayers for the faithful departed are useless, that mortification, penance, are useless. All of these ideas are coming back into circulation.

So on the contrary we have to reaffirm the Catholic truths and in particular those that concern purgatory.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Letter *Sub Catholica Professione*, to the bishop of Tusculum, March 6, 1254, in DS 838; DZ 456. Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

⁵⁷ DS 1304; DZ 693.

⁵⁸ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

⁵⁹ DS 1820; DZ 983.

⁶⁰ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

2. Scriptural sources

This dogma of the faith rests on Tradition more than on Scripture. Nonetheless Scripture offers us passages that allude to the existence of purgatory.

In an epistle which the Church uses for Masses that are said for the souls in purgatory, we have the story of the Machabees.⁶¹ Judas Machabeus sent the sum of 12,000 drachmas to Jerusalem to ask the priests to offer a sacrifice for the soldiers who died in the battle, so that they might be delivered from their pain and go to Heaven. And Scripture adds, "*It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins*" (2 Macc. 12:46).

And St. Paul likewise makes allusion to the souls in purgatory, saying that certain souls will go to Heaven immediately, but that others will be saved, "*yet so as through fire*" (1 Cor. 3:15), referring certainly to a purification for souls which are not perfectly prepared to enter Heaven.⁶²

It is on these allusions in Scripture, and especially on the Tradition bequeathed to us by the Apostles and by the Fathers of the Church, that the Church bases Her faith in the reality of purgatory.⁶³

3. Confirmation by the liturgy

All of the prayers, the suffrages, the indulgences, the alms which the Church advises and accomplishes for the dead have as their sole end to give solace and deliverance to the souls of purgatory, who can no longer do anything for themselves.

That is why it is necessary to insist on the fact that the existence of purgatory is an article of the faith. Is a heretic any who denies purgatory.

If purgatory did not exist, everything the Church from the beginning has done or asked to be done for the souls of the

⁶¹ In the 2nd century BC, the Machabees were the defenders of the law of Yahweh and of the independence of the state of Israel; their exploits are related in two books bearing their name.

⁶² *Quasi per ignem*. That is the interpretation of Origen and of Sts. Basil, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory.

⁶³ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

faithful departed would be pointless.⁶⁴

All of the appeals which the Church makes to St. Michael the Archangel and to the angels during the liturgy of the dead, asking them to carry the soul of the dead person to the bosom of the Father, in Paradise, in Heaven, have a meaning only if we believe in the existence of purgatory.

Indeed, if purgatory did not exist, the souls of the dead would already be in Heaven or else in hell, alas! Consequently, in either case, our prayers would be useless. Someone who is in Heaven no longer needs prayers, and someone who is in hell cannot benefit by them either, sadly.

So it is because we believe that there is a purgatory and that the souls who are there need our prayers that we send to Heaven our prayers for the faithful departed.⁶⁵

2. THE NATURE OF PURGATORY

1. *The Cleansing of the Soul*

We have to enter Heaven in the most perfect purity. It would be inconceivable that souls enter the vision of God, union with God, a union which surpasses anything our imagination can conceive (*1 Cor.* 2:9), enter into the divinity itself, participate in the light of God, and still retain dispositions contrary to that light, to the light of God, to the holiness of God.

That is why the souls of those who died in the state of grace but who have not entirely purged the pain due to their sins, even though their sins were forgiven, have to pass through this place of purification that will make them worthy to be presented to God, to be introduced into the Holy Trinity.⁶⁶

If we could know the holiness and the incomparable purity of God, we would not be surprised that He discovers imperfections in us that are not compatible with the holiness of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁷

There is no doubt that certain souls may go directly to

⁶⁴ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p.78; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 61.

⁶⁵ Sermon, Ecône, March 4, 1983.

⁶⁶ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

⁶⁷ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p.78-79; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 61.

Heaven after death. It is God who judges. But we know only too well that we are sinners. That is why we will probably all have to purify ourselves and remain in that ante-chamber of Heaven which is purgatory, in order to clean up our soul in a way, so that it will be pure, perfect, in order to meet Him who is truth, who is beauty, who is perfection, holiness, and to be in the company of the angels. So we pray that God might welcome our dear departed into His Paradise.⁶⁸

2. *A place of profound joy and acute suffering*

Can the souls in purgatory shorten their time of purification by any merits they might acquire? No, the souls in purgatory can no longer merit. Why? Because they are in a state where no more choice can be made. They are fixed definitively in sanctifying grace.

They have the certainty of being among the elect and that causes them a profound joy, an inalterable joy. They know that henceforth they are destined for Heaven. But they also endure an acute suffering, because they know much better than we do who God is, as well as the glory which, by His grace, God has promised us in Heaven. They suffer cruelly at the thought that they cannot yet draw near to God and live in Him for eternity.

They are also eaten up by remorse. They are witness to God's love for them, and they see that they sinned and that they kept their distance from Him. They know that they are suffering because of the sins that they committed, that they are being purified in order to enjoy the glory of the Lord. Yet, these souls in purgatory cannot shorten their own sufferings.⁶⁹

Certainly, the souls in purgatory draw progressively closer to Heaven and will be freed after their purification, but the suffrages of the Church militant can help them efficaciously to be delivered more quickly, above all by the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

On the other hand, the souls of purgatory, animated by charity, can intercede for us. They will do it all the more ardently that we in turn come to their aid.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Sermon, Ecône, March 4, 1983.

⁶⁹ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

⁷⁰ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p.78; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 61.

3. OUR DUTY TOWARD THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

If we wish to conform ourselves to the spirit of the Catholic Church, we have to have a true devotion to the souls of that purgatory where we ourselves will in all likelihood have to spend a certain amount of time; and let us hope for that, since it will be the sign of our election.⁷¹

The souls in purgatory count on us in order to reach Heaven more quickly. The members of the Church suffering and those of the Church militant are united by charity in our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷² So we can ask our Lord in our prayers, and particularly during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, that the souls in purgatory be delivered more rapidly from this place of expiation.⁷³ We can also help them by our acts of penance, by our sacrifices, and finally we can also take advantage of the treasures of the merits of the saints which the Church places at our disposal for their solace. The Church asks us also to make pilgrimages and to recite certain prayers in order to acquire merits and apply them to the souls in purgatory. We have to pray often for the souls in purgatory and take our inspiration from the magnificent prayers of the liturgy of the dead. If there were ever a liturgy overflowing with treasures of beauty, of grandeur, of sublimity, it is certainly the liturgy of the dead.

That is why we have to meditate often on that reality of purgatory and be united to the souls of our brothers, of our parents, of our friends who have died, and of all that countless multitude of souls who have no one among their acquaintances who prays for them.⁷⁴

4. THE MEANS OF SHORTENING OUR PURGATORY

We need to do penance to make reparation for the pain due to our sins which have already been forgiven, in order to shorten our own time in purgatory and even, if it please God, avoid purgatory altogether and go directly to be with Him in Heaven.⁷⁵

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 71, a. 1 and 2.

⁷³ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 71, a. 6 and 9.

⁷⁴ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1978.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

The doctrine of purgatory inspires us to do penance, to mortify ourselves and to carry our cross here below. Indeed, if there is a purification after death, all the more so ought there to be one before. If what has not been purified here below is going to have to be later, it ought to encourage us to effect that purification here below so we don't have to stay in purgatory for ages and ages.

To those who deny the necessity of penance and mortification, we can reply, "If there is a purification after death, it presupposes that we have not been completely purified here below. So we should purify ourselves, mortify ourselves here below if we want to go to Heaven, and not be stuck for ages in purgatory."⁷⁶

5. LIMBO

We will not spend too much time speaking of limbo, where souls go who have only original sin, without personal sin. These souls are deprived of the beatific vision, but since they know that they are in an absolute incapacity to enjoy it, they do not suffer; that is the opinion of St. Thomas and of most of the doctors of the Church.⁷⁷

It is precious for us to be able to answer parents whose child has died before he could be baptized, not by the fault of the parents. But what a responsibility for those mothers who have had an abortion or for those who have participated in some way! How can we not fear the curse of God for those crimes, in this world and in the next?

In these days when every single dogma is being called into question within the Church Herself, it is important to have a good knowledge of the doctrine of the Church, in order to reaffirm it and to save souls.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

⁷⁷ Fr. Francois Lachat, *Somme Théologique de Saint Thomas*, Ed. L. Vivès, vol. 25, q. 21, p. 480.

⁷⁸ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p.79; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 61-62.

6.

HEAVEN

What better way to close our considerations than by a glimpse at the ineffable gift which God makes of Himself to His elect through the Incarnate Word, a gift which defies all expression and all description, as St. Paul affirms: “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Cor. 2:9).⁷⁹

1. WHAT IS HEAVEN?

1. *The beauties of Heaven*

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent*⁸⁰ describes the nature of eternal life. Here are some passages: “Happiness is an accumulation of all good without admixture of evil... The intensity of the happiness which the just enjoy in their celestial country, and its utter incomprehensibility to all but themselves alone, are sufficiently conveyed by the very words *blessed life*...”

“The happiness of eternal life is, as defined by the Fathers, an exemption from all evil, and an enjoyment of all good. Concerning the exemption from all evil the Scriptures bear witness in the most explicit terms. For it is written in the Apocalypse: ‘*They shall no more hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat*’ (Apoc. 7:16); and again, ‘*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away.*’ (Apoc. 21:4) As for the glory of the blessed, it shall be without measure, and the kinds of their solid joys and pleasures without number.”⁸¹

It seems to me that we should also look to the Gospel if we want to have some idea of what the elect can see and understand in Heaven, of what their joy may be and their state of rapture.

Remember the episode of the Transfiguration of our Lord.

⁷⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p.83; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, 66.

⁸⁰ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, pp. 134-135.

⁸¹ Retreat, Morgon, October 1988; cf. *The Mass of All Time*, p. 47.

The Apostles are practically thrown to the ground by the splendor which our Lord unveils before their eyes, splendor more beautiful than the sun, they say. Our Lord, before His Passion, before the trial which the Apostles were going to undergo, willed to show them what He was in reality. Indeed, our Lord ought to have had that splendor and that light all the time, since He had the beatific vision, since He was in Heaven and even was Heaven.

We likewise know that by His splendor, by His light, our Lord at His Resurrection threw the guards to the ground, dazzled and awestruck by that light which shone out of His tomb (*cf. Mt. 28:4*). So we can think of everything as being light there in Heaven, everything as grandeur, everything as splendor.⁸²

2. *The vision of God*

“Solid happiness,” continues the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, “which we may designate by the common appellation, essential, consists in the vision of God, and the enjoyment of His beauty who is the source and principle of all goodness and perfection.⁸³ ‘This,’ says Christ our Lord, ‘is eternal life: that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent’ (Jn. 17:3)... Beatitude consists of two things: that we shall behold God such as He is in His own nature and substance; and that we ourselves shall become, as it were, gods.”⁸⁴

Of course, we will not be gods, that is obvious. That transformation of ourselves in Heaven will happen by the light of glory. The light of glory, which will be a participation in the light of glory of God, will make us, in a certain measure, know God as He truly is. We will see God directly, but we will not know Him of course in all His intimacy, otherwise we would have to be God ourselves.⁸⁵ Only the Word, in fact, and the two other Persons of the Trinity, can know themselves perfectly because they are God. So it is something tremendous!⁸⁶

We have no idea how the beatific vision will actually be, but we do know that it will be infinitely superior to anything we can

⁸² Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1976.

⁸³ *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 3, a. 4.

⁸⁴ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 136.

⁸⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 92, a. 1, ad 2.

⁸⁶ Retreat, Morgon, October 1988; *cf. The Mass of All Time*, pp. 47-48.

imagine. God takes us into Himself in a way. The Holy Trinity places us inside Its family to see the spectacle of the charity of God and enjoy it within the very Trinity Itself.⁸⁷

Read in the *Apocalypse* the definition of Heaven by St. John: "And I saw no temple in Heaven, for the Lord God almighty is the temple thereof" (cf. *Apoc.* 21:22). God Himself is the happiness of the elect, it is in God Himself that the elect reside. If therefore Jesus Christ is God, it is in Him we shall reside for eternity. For He is God, and so He is our end, our paradise.⁸⁸

It is not an image or an idea of God which we will see in our minds but God Himself, without any intermediary. God, supremely intelligible, will Himself become the immediate object, the form of our intelligences. We will therefore know Him in truth as He is. That is why it is impossible here below for us to imagine what that vision can be, which will enflame our souls with an indefectible love for Jesus and the Holy Trinity.

What we see in God is going to surpass in beauty, in goodness, in splendor, anything we can imagine. We will admire the Church triumphant and especially our Lord with all His royal and divine privileges, Mary Queen of Heaven adorned with all her gifts, myriads of archangels and angels, and all the elect with their diversity of glory measured out according to their degree of charity. God will be truly all in all, honored and adored as He should be, without discordance (*1 Cor.* 15:28). In the light of the infinite being of the Holy Trinity, of Its perfections, our souls will be in a transport of gratitude for everything that God deigned to undergo for our salvation, and we will be speechless at the mercy that God has shown to us.

Tradition teaches us that virgins, martyrs and doctors will have particular haloes that will increase their glory.⁸⁹

3. *The light of glory*

The light of glory is none other than the light by which God knows Himself. God is going to communicate to us His own light, He is going to raise our intellects and our faith is going to unfold

⁸⁷ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 3rd conference.

⁸⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 20, 1977.

⁸⁹ *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 83-84; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 66-67.

as a flower unfolds in the sun. Our faith is like the bud which is going to blossom. For the moment, it is enclosed. We do not see the infinite perfections of God, we do not see all the mysteries, such as that of the Trinity. We believe in them, but we do not see them. Heaven will therefore be a little like the flower which unfolds as it receives the light of the sun.⁹⁰

As the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*⁹¹ explains, "This the light of His glory will accomplish. Illumined by its splendor we shall see God, '*the true light, in His own light*' (Ps. 35:10).

"And by this greatest and most exalted of gifts, being made partakers of the divine nature, the blessed enjoy true and solid happiness."

4. *The joy of the elect*

What will make our happiness in Heaven, what makes already the joy of the elect, will be to contemplate the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁹² and even to see Him in His human reality.⁹³

"To enumerate all the delights with which the souls of the blessed shall be filled would be an endless task. We cannot even conceive them in thought... This must be in a manner more exalted than, to use the Apostle's words, '*eye hath seen, ear heard, or the heart of man conceived*' (1 Cor. 2:9)."⁹⁴

And so Heaven is so beautiful, so splendid, so moving that it will enrapture us and we will be in a transport of joy at drawing near to Him who is our God. To draw near to Him is to draw near to light, to charity, to love. Souls who are in His presence are outside of time. It is certainly difficult for us to conceive of these things, and yet it is the reality. Everything that we can know of Heaven makes us hope that one day we will go to join those who are there and who are enjoying eternal bliss.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 9th conference.

⁹¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 137-139.

⁹² *Summa Theologica*, I^aII^{ae}, q. 3, a. 4.

⁹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 20, 1977.

⁹⁴ Retreat, Morgon, October 1988.

⁹⁵ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1976.

5. *Blessed eternity*

1. Eternity

It is good to think often about the eternity of God. It is very difficult, obviously. For us, there is always a past, a present and a future. So how can we conceive of eternity, that instant which always is? That seems inconceivable. And yet it is so.

We are always trying to put God inside a time, for example with reference to Creation. If Creation had a beginning, it would seem that something began in God. Well no, that is false. Nothing began in God. He is always the same.

The eternity of God and the absence of time in God were already expressed in the Old Testament. When Moses asked God, Jehovah, what His name was, the answer was, “*I am who am*” (Ex. 3:14).⁹⁶ And God added, “*Tell the Jews that He who is sends you toward Israel*” (cf. Ex. 3:14).⁹⁷

We must not imagine eternal life as a kind of time that does not end. Otherwise, we are tired before we start. We cannot compare time and eternity. Eternity is not a time, it is something else: fortunately for the elect! Time is a fiction. The past no longer exists, the future does not yet exist. Only the present moment exists. But thanks to our memory, we remember the past and we can foresee the future. By the stars which turn, we manage to count the hours, the days, the months, the years. It is like that on earth, we manage to situate ourselves. But eternity is something else. Eternity is above time. There is no time in eternity. Eternity is like a point, an instant which lasts forever. It is a continual present. Eternity, says Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, is easier to understand than time. Time is more mysterious. God embraces time, so to speak, He embraces the past and the future. He is above all that. That is why time is considered in relation to eternity and not the other way around.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Ego sum qui sum.*

⁹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 29, 1980.

⁹⁸ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Life Everlasting and the Immensity of the Soul (L'Eternelle Vie et la Profondeur de l'Ame, 1947)*, translated by Patrick Cummins, O.S.B., TAN Books, Rockford, Ill., 1991, cf. pp. 184-185. Retreat, Morgon, October 1988, cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 46-47.

2. Eternal bliss

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* insists on what is meant by “life everlasting.”

“The faithful, therefore, are to be informed that the words, ‘life everlasting,’ signify not only continuance of existence, which even the demons and the wicked possess, but also that perpetuity of happiness which is to satisfy the desires of the blessed. In this sense they were understood by the lawyer mentioned in the Gospel when he asked the Lord our Savior: ‘*What shall I do to possess everlasting life?*’ (Lk. 10:25) as if he had said, ‘*What shall I do in order to arrive at the enjoyment of perfect happiness?*’ In this sense these words are understood in the Sacred Scriptures, as is clear from many passages.

“The supreme happiness of the blessed is called by this name ‘life everlasting’ principally to exclude the notion that it consists in corporeal and transitory things, which cannot be everlasting.”⁹⁹

2. THE QUALITIES OF RESURRECTED BODIES

The glory of God, His splendor, His light will cover us and will make us glorious; that glory will extend even to our spiritualized bodies, endowed with the properties of impassibility, subtlety, agility, and clarity.¹⁰⁰

But as St. Thomas says very well, every enjoyment in our body will be an infinitely small thing next to the enjoyment in our soul.¹⁰¹ Our body will then be subject to the qualities of our soul. Whereas now, on the contrary, our soul is in a way imprisoned in our body and obliged to follow it around. It cannot move itself, it cannot have that agility, that rapidity, that subtlety which spirits have. But in Heaven, on the contrary, our body will have the qualities of our soul, that is to say, subtlety, transparency, light, agility, rapidity in moving from one place to another.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, pp. 132-133. Easter retreat, Ecône, March 25, 1975.

¹⁰⁰ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 82-85. *Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 83; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 66.

¹⁰¹ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 92, a. 2, ad 6.

¹⁰² Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

3. THE DWELLINGS OF HEAVEN

It is obvious that in Heaven, the elect are distinct from one another. Their degree of perfection depends on their degree of knowledge and love of God.¹⁰³ As St. Paul says, “*star differs from star in glory*” (1 Cor. 15:41).¹⁰⁴ We see stars in the heavens that are more or less bright, each one of them has its light. And that is also the way it is in Heaven. According to the light of the knowledge of God that we have, we will be closer to Him or farther away.¹⁰⁵

Those differences among spirits will be another one of our joys. Among the angels, the archangels and those who are closest to God, who are more intimate with Him, communicate their knowledge and their joy to angels less favored than they. And it will be the same thing with the saints. The souls who were holier will be able to give us greater communications. And there will be a whole interaction and exchange which will make a perfect unity, since we will no longer be able to want anything but the will of God. No soul in Paradise will be able to will anything except the will of God. Consequently, there will be a perfect unity among those souls who are united in the will of God, which is the Holy Spirit; which is the Spirit of love.¹⁰⁶

4. THE INHABITANTS OF HEAVEN

St. John in the *Apocalypse* speaks to us of those immense crowds, not only of the Jewish people, but come from all the ends of the earth, from all nations, who are singing His praises and “*they worshiped God, saying, ‘Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength to our God forever and ever. Amen.’*” (Apoc. 7:11-12)¹⁰⁷

There will not be any Protestants in Heaven, there will not be any Buddhists, it is not possible. There will only be Catholics. There will only be sons of our Lord, children of the Church. I am not saying that there won't be some people who were in Buddhism, but they will not be in Heaven as Buddhists; they will be in

¹⁰³ *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 93, a. 2 and a. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Stella a stella differt in claritate*.

¹⁰⁵ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1986, 2nd conference.

¹⁰⁶ Retreat for seminarians, Ecône, September 23, 1978, 12th conference.

¹⁰⁷ Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1976.

Heaven because they will then be members of the Catholic Church; because, being Buddhist and yet wanting to do the will of God, they made an act of charity, of submission to God which gave them baptism of desire and made them implicitly Catholic.¹⁰⁸

5. INEXPRESSIBLE HAPPINESS: FRUIT OF OUR VICTORY

The beatific vision will give us a happiness that we cannot imagine. It is what St. Paul says, “*I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us*” (Rom. 8:18). The recompense will be infinitely superior to all of the trials that we may undergo here on earth, for we will participate in the nature of God in such a way that we see Him directly, without any intermediary.¹⁰⁹

So let us try, while we are still here on earth, to imagine what our soul is going to see. And let us try to act toward our Lord as the saints in Heaven act and the angels who are in the presence of God.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 1974.

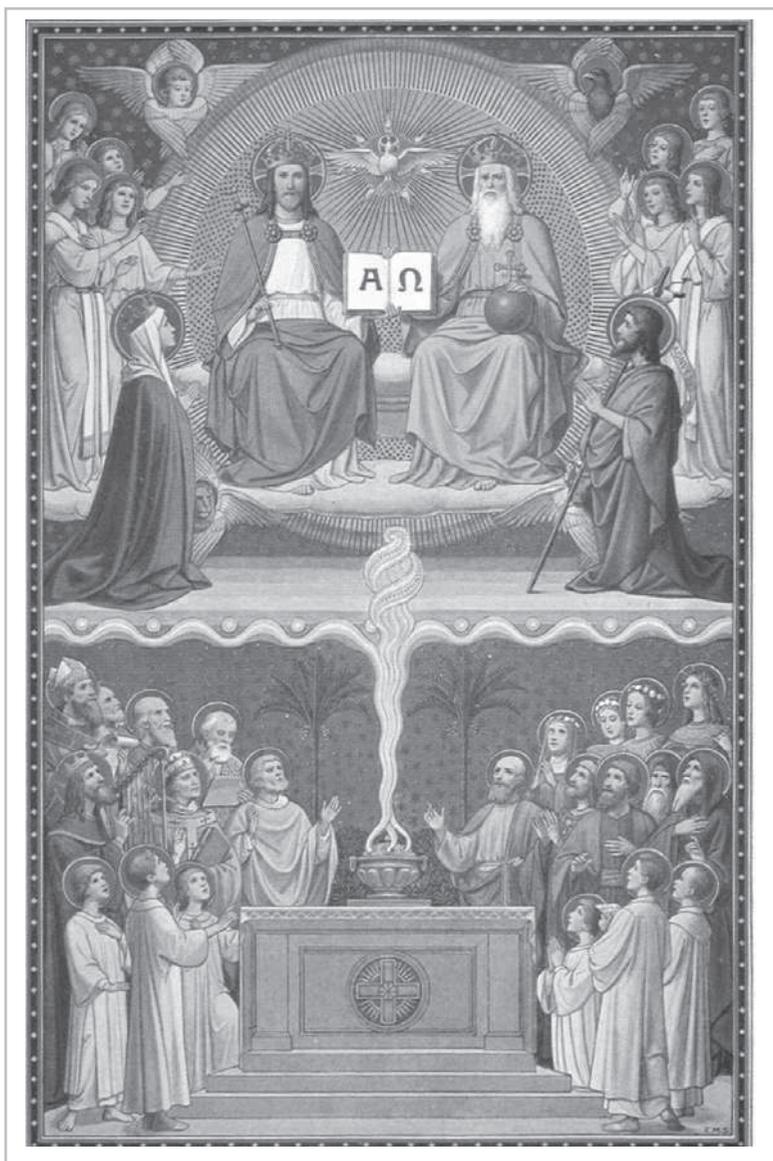
¹⁰⁹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 23, 1984, 4th conference.

¹¹⁰ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, September 23, 1984, 3rd conference.

Conclusion

**HOW BEAUTIFUL
CATHOLIC DOCTRINE IS**





HOW BEAUTIFUL CATHOLIC DOCTRINE IS

Here we offer, as a general conclusion, a synthetic view of the spiritual life such as Archbishop Lefebvre lived it and such as he taught it to the souls whom God confided to him throughout his long priestly and episcopal life.

Our piety has to have solid foundations so that, if the storm comes, if difficulties come along, our spiritual life does not change. It cannot change if it is built on definitive, eternal principles, on realities which come to us from God. We can rely on those principles absolutely.

We have to remain faithful to these principles, which are simple, actually. We have to be united to our Lord and have recourse to the sacraments which He instituted in order to have the life of the Holy Spirit in us. If we want to be saved, if we want to have the presence of the Holy Trinity in us, we absolutely have to go through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself tells us so (*Jn.* 15:5-6). That means practically speaking that we need to have sanctifying grace, that grace which is given to us through baptism and through the other sacraments. Baptism is the door of our spiritual life. And life flows in us in abundance by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass above all, because we receive the Holy Trinity Itself in our hearts by Holy Communion. That is the life of the Holy Spirit which our Lord Jesus Christ communicates to us.

And that sanctifying grace, that presence of the Holy Trinity in us, is going to inspire us to observe the commandments of God, not like the people of the Old Testament, but in an even more perfect manner, for they did not have the spiritual gifts which we have now by the presence of the Holy Trinity in us and by the sacraments. That is why our Lord never tires of repeating, "*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another*" (*Jn.* 13:34). And so the spiritual life develops in us through prayer, through the sacraments, and makes us love God and our neighbor. It is the summary of all spirituality, it is simple. And it is not a spirituality

which is reserved to monks, to nuns or to priests. It is a spirituality which is proper to every Christian. Any person who wants to be saved has to be attached to our Lord Jesus Christ.

And standing in opposition to that spiritual life which our Lord wants to give us and in opposition to that presence of the Holy Trinity in us, there is the world. Our Lord is aware of the danger which the world represents for our salvation. So He puts us on our guard against the spirit of the world (*Jn.* 15:18-20). He tells us that we are not of the world and that He is not of the world. And He warns us, "You will be persecuted by the world. The world hated Me and it will hate you."

And so the plan of God is not complicated. Our holy religion is not complex, it is a religion of charity. God wants to give us back that charity which we lost through sin, charity toward Him first, and essentially toward Him, toward the Holy Trinity, for we have to love our neighbor for God.

So, you see, in a few lines, our Lord summarizes in a marvelous way, in a magnificent way, what He wants us to be and what He has done for us.¹

What a marvelous and consoling doctrine is that of the Catholic Church revealed by the Word of God Incarnate over the course of human history, and which He brought to its definitive fullness when He came to dwell among us! The Apostles faithfully transcribed and transmitted that precious deposit, and so the prophetic period came to a close; so began the dogmatic period during which the Church defines what is part of that deposit.

The Fathers of the Church, the theologians, under the vigilance of the Church, faithfully scrutinized that deposit, interpreted it, organized it, defended it against heresies.

St. Thomas shines among them like a light. His *Summa Theologica* is a masterpiece of the collaboration between faith and reason to establish Revelation on irrefutable foundations: it shows with perfect clarity that the two sources are of divine origin and can therefore only mutually confirm each other. The faith remains nonetheless the surer source of the knowledge of God and of things divine; it remains the golden rule of wisdom.

¹ Retreat for the Sisters of the Society, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, *Quasimodo* 1989, 8th conference.

The *Summa* could be summarized as follows: to come from God so as to return to God by means of God; such is the human destiny. What a marvel! What a vocation! The presentation of this life-plan at the school of St. Thomas throws us constantly into admiration and contemplation before the mysteries of the wisdom, of the knowledge, of the charity of God and His mercy for human creatures.²

Let us hold the faith supreme; it is for the faith that our Lord died, for having affirmed His divinity; it is for the faith that all the martyrs died; it is by the faith that all of the elect were sanctified. Let us flee those who make us lose our faith or who diminish our faith.

*“O Timothy, guard the trust and keep free from profane novelties in speech” (1 Tim. 6:20). “Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal” (1 Tim. 6:12).*³

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 for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the reign of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴

² *Itinéraire Spirituel*, pp. 82-83; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, pp. 65-66.

³ *O Timothee, depositum custodi, devitans profanas vocum novitates... Certa bonum certamen fidei, apprehende vitam æternam. Itinéraire Spirituel*, p. 85; cf. *Spiritual Journey*, p. 68.

⁴ Sermon, Montalenghe, August 22, 1982, in *Priestly Holiness*, p. 480.

GLOSSARY

Abandon or **Abandonment**: signifies desertion or the fact of being deserted; neglect (for example, the abandon of all discipline); but also, in the mystical life, confidence in God (for example, abandonment or surrender to Providence).

Abstinence: exclusion of certain foods or the reduction of the amount of food

Accident: that to which it belongs to exist in another. Thus, quality, relation, time, place, position, and so on, are accidents.

Adoration: special honor reserved to God by reason of His infinite greatness and of the submission which we as creatures owe to Him.

Aggredi: Latin verb meaning *to attack*. As a substantive, it signifies the movement of the virtue of fortitude which consists in going toward the obstacles of the spiritual life in order to remove them. It is distinct from *sustinere*. See that term.

Agility: property of glorified bodies of being moved by their soul without hindrance and at will after their resurrection, like the body of Jesus on the day of the Ascension.

Albigensian: heretical sect from the South of France (Albi), founded on Manichean dualism (see Manichaeism) and also called Catharism. Rejecting all matter as evil, the Albigensians endangered 13th century society until the eradication of the sect by the "Albigensian crusade."

Anoint: apply holy oils to a part of the body to bless or consecrate.

Anointing: (see Unction) to anoint.

Arianism: heresy of the 4th century, taking its name from the priest of Alexandria, Arius, who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. Arius was condemned at the first council of Nicæa (325).

Arians: adherents of the heresy of Arius, and who then divided into a multitude of sects and tried to destroy the Church between 330 and 370, with the support of the Roman emperors.

Asceticism: effort aiming at combating and suppressing one's disordered tendencies.

Aseity: from the Latin *a se*, of itself. Divine attribute expressing the fact that God exists of Himself.

Attrition (or imperfect contrition): regret of one's sins on account of their ugliness or by fear of the chastisements which they merit.

Backbiting: revealing the faults of our neighbor, leading to an unjust damage to his reputation.

Beatific vision: view of God, face to face and without intermediary, which is the eternal source of immeasurable love, peace and joy for the soul.

Beatitude: heavenly happiness or bliss, fruit of the vision of the divine essence.

Beatitudes: maxims of Jesus Christ beginning with the word *blessed* and ending with the assured recompense of the virtue which they express. (*Mt. 5*)

Bliss (eternal): happiness of the saints and angels in Heaven.

Carnal: of the flesh. Carnal pleasures are tied to the propagation of life. Sometimes, the term *carnal* is extended to pleasures of food and drink.

Catechumen: adult person already living according to the Christian law and receiving a complete instruction on the Christian faith to dispose him to receive baptism.

Catharism, Cathar: (see Albigensian and Manichaeism)

Catholic Church: society or gathering of all the baptized who, living on earth, profess the same faith, follow the same law of Jesus Christ, participate in the same sacraments, and obey the legitimate pastors, principally the Roman pontiff. The Church founded by Jesus Christ is the Catholic Church.

Chastity: moral virtue which moderates or excludes the desire for carnal pleasures.

Chrism: blend of oil and balsam consecrated by the bishop on Holy Thursday and used for anointing in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and in the consecration of bishops.

Circuminsession: mysterious attraction by which the three divine Persons are carried toward each other, go from one to the other.

Complicity: understanding, cooperation, agreement.

Compunction: habitual contrition for sins committed.

Concupiscence of the flesh: disordered love of sense pleasures.

Concupiscence of the eyes: disordered love of the goods of the earth.

Consolation: delight of the senses or of the soul which is the effect of love of God, or else peace and repose tasted in the accomplishing of God's good pleasure.

Consubstantial: which forms a single substance (see Substance).

Contemplation: a simple, permanent and loving attention of the mind to divine things. It is ordinarily the fruit of meditation.

Cor: Latin word meaning heart. In certain circumstances it can signify the will, as Archbishop Lefebvre points out.

Co-Redemptrix: the special union of the Blessed Virgin with the redemptive sacrifice of her son on the cross led Benedict XV to affirm, "so we may well say that she, with Christ, redeemed mankind" (*Apostolic Letter, "Inter Sodalicia,"* March 22, 1918, AAS, 1918, t. 10, p. 182; English translation in *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, St. Paul Editions, Solesmes, 1961, p. 194).

Council of Ephesus: third ecumenical council (431) which defined the hypostatic union of the two natures, divine and human, in Jesus Christ and, on the same occasion, the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin. It condemned Nestorius who dissociated the eternal Son of the Father from the man Jesus of Nazareth, and consequently refused to the Blessed Virgin the title *Mother of God*.

Council of Florence: seventeenth ecumenical council (1439-1445) held for the return of the Orthodox Christians to the Church. It specified the procession of the Holy Spirit through the Father and the Son; purgatory; and the primacy of the Roman pontiff, successor of Peter, to rule and govern the universal Church.

Council of Lyon (2nd): fourteenth ecumenical council (1274). Presided over by pope Gregory IX, it treated of the conquest of the Holy Land; of the union of the Eastern and Western Churches and the pontifical election; and of purgatory. St. Bonaventure attended the first four sessions and died there on July 15.

Council of Trent: nineteenth ecumenical council, convoked by Pope Paul III on May 22, 1542, held in three episodes between December 13, 1545 and December 4, 1563. Spread over eighteen years, its twenty-five sessions covered five pontificates. Two goals were assigned to it: to define the truths of the faith called into question by the Protestant reform (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Tyndale); to pursue and develop the reform of the Church begun a century before. This council recalls the doctrine of original sin; specifies that of justification; affirms the two sources of Revelation (Holy Scripture and Tradition), the honor of saints and relics; and defines the nature of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On

the disciplinary level, it founded seminaries for the formation of priests.

Credo (or symbol) of Nicæa: profession of faith which summarizes the fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine. It was promulgated at the Council of Nicæa in the year 325 and was completed at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Credo (or symbol) of St. Athanasius: profession of faith recited in the traditional Roman breviary during the office of Prime on the feast of the Holy Trinity. It begins with these words: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance..."

Crusade: comes from "to take up one's cross," that is to say, to renounce a life of ease and follow Jesus Christ as a faithful disciple. Whence this term used to signify the expeditions organized beginning in the 11th century to deliver the Holy Land from the hands of the infidels. By extension, this term signifies the enterprise which aims to render to Jesus Christ the place He deserves not only in personal and family life, but also in professional and social life.

Desolation: state of sensible and spiritual darkness and trouble within the soul. Combined with temptations and the inclination to earthly things, it brings the soul into sadness and renders difficult the practice of love of God.

Dicasteries: these are the different ministries or departments of the Roman Curia or central government of the Catholic Church. Their members fulfill their responsibilities in the name of the pope and under his authority.

Dilection: love. St. Francis de Sales explains that, "the heavenly commandment of love is expressed by the word dilection rather than by the word love; for although dilection is a kind of love, yet is it not a simple love, but a love of choice and election, which sense the word itself conveys, as the glorious St. Thomas notes: for this commandment enjoins us a love chosen out of thousands, the well-beloved object of this love being chosen out of thousands."⁵

Ecumenism: movement to foster the reunion of all Christian

⁵ *Treatise on the Love of God*, bk. 10, ch. 6, Benziger Brothers, NY, 1884.

“Churches” into a single Church, uniting all of the so-called values of salvation dispersed today in the various confessions. The only desirable ecumenism is in fact the return of the lost sheep to the sheepfold, that is, the Catholic Church, sole arc of salvation (see Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*).

Essence: the essence of a thing signifies what it is, what makes it belong to a given species, e.g., humanity, table...

Eternal life: blessed life of the saints and angels of Heaven.

Familiarity: may signify the bonds of affection which unite friends among themselves, but also an excessive casualness in behavior leading to lack of respect of persons, images of God and temples of the Holy Spirit.

Fathers of the Church: term already used by St. Basil (330-379; cf. Epistle 140) to signify the Ecclesiastical writers of Christian Antiquity particularly authorized for their Catholic teaching. They lived between Apostolic times until St. Gregory the Great (†604) in the West, and until St. John Damascene (†749) in the East.

Freedom: power given to man to allow him to conduct himself voluntarily in the good and so to attain his final end which is God. Freedom therefore does not apply to the choice of a final end, since man is made for God, but applies only to the choice of honest means which allow man to attain Him.

Gethsemane (in Hebrew *oil-press*): garden planted with olive trees and located to the east of Jerusalem at the foot of the Temple, where Jesus Christ endured His agony.

Glorified body: state of the human body of the just after the resurrection of the flesh. The body is then incorruptible, spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44), agile, not subject to suffering, and clothed in clarity.

Gloss: commentary made in the margin of Holy Scripture.

Guardian Angel: protecting angel confided to every man by God.

Habitus: signifies, according to Aristotle, “self-possession.” It is therefore a stable quality, an enrichment, a perfection of our entire being. The plural has the same form.

Hell: word from the Old English *hel* meaning the underworld, from the Norse *hellir*, to hide or conceal, and signifying the place of eternal torments where dwell the souls of the damned, that is, men who have died in the state of mortal sin as well as fallen angels, or *devils*. The adjective *infernal* echoes the Latin word for hell, *infernus* (inferior), the nether-regions.

Hypostatic: The hypostatic union signifies the substantial union of

the divine nature and the human nature in the very Person of the Word, second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Illuminative way: (see Purgative, illuminative or unitive way)

Immutability: divine attribute signifying the fact that God knows no variation or change.

Immutable: which is not subject to change.

Impassibility: property of the body of Adam before original sin of being not subject to suffering. This preternatural gift will be given back to the glorified body of saints.

Impetratory: comes from the word *impetration* which means *obtention*. Thus, an impetratory prayer is a prayer which one recites to obtain a grace, a benefit, an assistance.

Implacability: hardness which finds expression in the desire to do evil to one's enemies.

Incarnation: signifies that the second Person of the Holy Trinity, that is, the Son of God, became man.

Incontinence: lack of restraint in the domain of the concupiscible appetite (greed, drunkenness, lust).

Indefectible: which cannot fail, end or decay. Indefectibility is one of the attributes of the Catholic Church, along with authority and infallibility.

Infallibility: which is not subject to error. Strictly, the pope alone and the universal council united to the pope are infallible in matters of faith and morals when they define a truth binding the entire Church to receive it. That infallibility comes from the Holy Spirit. It is granted to the Church for the realization of Her mission of the salvation of souls.

Iniquity: signifies injustice or sometimes simply means evil.

Integrity: purity or character of what is entire, complete, not corrupted.

Integral (confession): confession in which the penitent accuses himself of all of his grave sins which he remembers without hiding any of them voluntarily.

Jehovah: The tetragrammaton *yhwh* is a Hebrew name. The term *tetragrammaton* comes from the Greek and signifies "word with four letters." Jehovah is the proper name of God heard by Moses on Mount Sinai. It is generally translated by the word Yahweh.

Judgment (Last): public judgment of all men, after the resurrection of the dead, pronounced by Jesus Christ in glory at the end of the world.

Judgment (Particular): judgment of each man at the instant of his death by which God grants Heaven, purgatory or hell depending on his merits. “For it is easy before God in the day of death to reward every one according to his ways... In the end of a man is the disclosing of his works.” (Ecclus. 11:28-29)

Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven): in the Gospel, expressions which Jesus Christ uses to signify the Church which He founded.

Last Supper: meal of leave-taking which Jesus ate with His Apostles on the eve of His death and during which He instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice and the priesthood.

Liturgical: comes from *latría*, which means adoration (see Adoration). Is said of one of the finalities of the prayer of the Mass.

Law (positive): law established by divine or human institution and having to be in accord with the natural law innate in man.

Liberalism: Absolute liberalism is the disordering of freedom in every domain. It is the refusal to depend on another than oneself. Beside this exalted liberalism, which is the enemy of religion and even of the natural order, there exists a moderate liberalism which nuances that liberal position: the “liberal Catholic” wants to reconcile Catholicism and liberalism; “Enemy of all intransigence, moderated in principle, he mostly has a moderate taste for the truth and a mediocre hatred for error. He blends Catholic whiteness and liberal blackness and so creates a loveable grayishness which is in fact a masterpiece of confusion.”⁶ Finally, we point out that certain people only apply liberalism to a certain domain: teaching, civil society, politics...

Liberty: (see Freedom)

Manichaeism: religious sect founded in the 3rd century by Manes which taught dualism: from all eternity, two contrary principles, Good and Evil, have organized the universe, with matter coming from the evil principle.

Meditation: (see *Oratio*) attentive reflection, reiterated or maintained voluntarily in the mind. In the life of prayer, this term signifies a spiritual exercise in which man considers certain truths of the faith in order to arouse his will to holy affections and resolutions.

⁶ Fr. Alfred Roussel, *Liberalism and Catholicism (Libéralisme et Catholicisme*, 1926), cf. translation by Fr. Coenraad Daniels, Angelus Press, Kansas City, MO, 1998, p. 65.

Miracle: fact which departs from the laws of nature and can only be produced by God.

Modernism: ensemble of philosophical and theological errors flowing from false principles about the natural and supernatural understanding of man and leading to a divorce between the order of nature and the order of grace. Modernism wants to reconcile the Church with the world in making Her doctrine evolve according to the variations of the religious experience of believers. St. Pius X defined it as “the synthesis of all heresies” (Encyclical *Pascendi*, 1907, §39).

Mortification: totality of means whose object is to suppress, to kill as far as possible, whatever in oneself is cause of sin, that is, the flesh of the “old man.”

Naturalism: philosophical theory which consists in claiming that in all things nature and human reason should be master and sovereign. Consequently, it refuses to admit the weaknesses of man tied to original sin or his elevation to the supernatural order by grace. It refuses above all to submit to God, principle and end of all things.

Nourishment (spiritual): effect produced in the soul by a fervent prayer or by the reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The generous soul thus renews its spiritual powers by maintaining a regular and profound contact with God.

Oath (anti-Modernist): oath which Pope St. Pius X imposed in 1910 on ecclesiastics as a guarantee of their orthodoxy (see Modernism).

Oblation: offering for a ritual or religious sacrifice.

Oratio: (see Meditation) St. Teresa of Avila defines meditation, *oratio*, as a conversation of friendship wherein the soul speaks heart to heart with one (Jesus) of who it knows itself loved. The expression “to meditate” in this sense signifies mental prayer during which this personal, intimate contact is established between the soul and God.

Paradise (earthly): garden of delights where God placed Adam and Eve at their creation, until original sin.

Pelagianism: heresy of the 5th century denying the necessity of grace, the transmission of original sin and the distinction between the natural order and the supernatural order.

Pelagian: adherent of the heresy of Pelagius.

Penance: conversion of the heart turning from sin committed and enduring the reparation which it implies under the form of pri-

vations or austerities (fasting, vigils...).

Pentecostalism: religious current of the beginning of the 20th century born of Protestantism. It casts its roots in the *holiness movement* (born within American Methodism) and the “Evangelical revival,” movements which dominated the religious scene in the United States in the second half of the 19th century. Its adherents receive a supposed “baptism of the Spirit,” source of exceptional superhuman powers: miracles, healings, “talking in tongues”... From its earliest years, there was a proliferation of independent Pentecostal sects, but founded on a doctrine very close to that of the Evangelical “Churches.”

Pharisees: Jews who affected to distinguish themselves by a minute observance of the rules of the Mosaic Law. Pharisaism signifies, in religious matters, an excessive pride, a narrow formalism and a marked tendency to hypocrisy.

Positive law: (see Law (positive))

Prodigy: action which surpasses the natural capacities of man. The devil can therefore be at the origin of a prodigy, but God alone can work a miracle (see Miracle).

Progressivists: Pius IX defines them as follows in his encyclical *Qui Pluribus* of November 9, 1846: “Other enemies of divine revelation, with reckless and sacrilegious effrontery, want to import the doctrine of human progress into the Catholic religion. They extol it with the highest praise, as if religion itself were not of God but the work of men, or a philosophical discovery which can be perfected by human means.”

Propitiation: sacrifice offered to God in reparation for the sins of men.

Propitiatory: which has the virtue of rendering propitious. The high-priest wore on his chest, when he officiated, a vestment of this name to indicate his role as mediator between God and Israel.

Protestantism: The Protestant Reformation broke the unity of medieval Christendom in the West between 1520 and 1550. Half of Europe then rejected the authority of the Catholic Church and adhered instead to national religions under the pretext of the reformation of morals and of Ecclesiastical discipline. In fact, the Protestants (name received in 1529 in the German empire) call into question the essential truths of the Christian faith (rejection of Tradition as source of Revelation, of the authority of the pope, of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, of the Catholic priesthood, of the place of the Blessed Virgin in the economy of salvation, of the meritorious value of good actions performed in a state of

grace, etc.) under the empire of the principle generally formulated as follows: separation of reason and religion. At the beginning of the third millennium there are around 400 million Protestants, divided among 70,000 sects, of which the most well known categories are the Anglicans, the Baptists, the Calvinists, the Evangelicals, the Lutherans, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians.

Providence: mysterious and nonetheless very wise government of God over creation by which He guides beings to their end.

Purgative, illuminative or unitive way: these three adjectives signify the three periods of the spiritual life. During the first, the soul is purified of its faults; during the second, the Christian virtues are already well rooted in the soul and it starts to receive profound lights on God and on itself in prayer; and during the third period, it is united intimately to God and is introduced into the perfect life. These three ages are described in the part of this volume on charity, under the subtitle: *The steps of an increase in charity*.

Purgatory: the place of purification where souls dwell who die in a state of grace without having expiated all the pain due to their sins.

Purpose (firm): solid resolution not to fall back into sin and to avoid its occasions.

Rationalism: negation of anything above reason and of whatever is not produced by reason. Rationalism is therefore a form of naturalism. It is naturalism applied to the domain of reason. The rationalist proclaims the independence of the intellect with respect to its object: relativistic subjectivism. Rather than letting itself be informed by the real, rather than submitting to the exterior world, he claims that reason is what constructs the truth. Things are no longer what they are but what each one thinks they are.

Redemption: etymologically, "buy back; deliverance of a captive by means of a ransom." In matter of religion, the death of Jesus Christ buying men back by carrying the punishment merited through their sins and so giving them the possibility of becoming children of God through baptism.

Revelation: removal of a veil, whether material or spiritual, which hinders the vision or the intelligence of a thing. Christian Revelation is the teaching by God of supernatural truths necessary to work one's eternal salvation. This Revelation was closed at the death of the last of the Apostles. It comes to us orally (Tradition) and in writing (the Bible).

Sacrifice: Sacrifice has its origin in the state of dependence, as a crea-

ture and as a sinner, in which man is aware that he stands before God. From the beginning of time, man has offered sensible and material things to God to express to Him the acceptance of that dependence. But it is not enough to offer Him these elements; it is also necessary, by a sacrificial rite, to operate the translation of the matter offered into the domain of God. An exterior sacrifice consists therefore in offering to God an object, rendered improper for all human use, in order to manifest the will of relinquishing it and making it belong to God. This exterior sacrifice signifies the interior, spiritual sacrifice by which the soul offers itself to God.

Satan: Hebrew word meaning *adversary, accuser*, and which is translated in the Greek Bible of the Septuagint by *devil*. Christ often spoke of this adversary who personifies the power of evil: the relentless enemy of God and His saints, the head of the devils, the Wicked One who is a revolted and fallen angel.

Satisfaction: contentment, pleasure which results from the accomplishment of what one awaits, of what one desires; in theology, the action by which one makes reparation for an offense.

Scheol: Old Testament term signifying the dwelling place of the dead.

Scribe: among the Jews, a layman responsible for transmitting intact the sacred text and for interpreting it. The pride and jealousy of these “doctors of the Law” made them reject Jesus Christ.

Scriptural: of Holy Scripture. A Scriptural text is therefore a text taken from the Old or the New Testament.

Simoniac: stained with simony.

Simony: from the name of Simon the Magician; the buying or selling of sacred things.

Species: the totality of all individuals of a similar aspect having common characteristics distinguishing them within a single genre, and having the power to engender fertile individuals. In a given species, all individuals have a same nature and are only distinguished by the matter or more exactly by “quantified matter.” All men are therefore a single *humanity*, which means that their souls are identical in their essence. Souls are diverse by reason of their bodies which they inform and which are necessarily different. The angels, being of purely spiritual nature, cannot be distinguished by matter. That is why there are as many species as there are angels. Species can also signify appearance; the sacred species are the Eucharist, of the body and blood of Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine.

Substance: that which exists in itself as subject of specific activity (e.g.: table, horse). It is distinguished from accidents which exist in some other thing, that is, quality, quantity, relation, time, place...

Subtlety: property of glorified bodies of passing through matter all in remaining palpable. Jesus Christ thus left the tomb and penetrated into the Upper Room, all the doors being closed.

Summa Theologica: synthesis of all theological knowledge, written by St. Thomas Aquinas and divided into three principal parts: God and Creation; then the return of man toward God; and finally Jesus Christ, the sacraments and the last things.

Supererogatory: describes a superfluous addition.

Supernatural: which surpasses the order of nature and, consequently, cannot be demanded by nature, but is given gratuitously by God. Thus it is with the state of grace, which is a participation by the creature in the intimate life of God.

Supreme: most eminent. "The supreme science of Christ" signifies that the knowledge of Christ is science *par excellence*.

Sustinere: Latin verb meaning *sustain, endure*. As a substantive, it signifies the movement of the virtue of strength which consists in holding out in the adversity encountered in the spiritual life. It is distinct from *aggredi* (see that term).

Thoughtlessness: the fact of not taking the consequences of one's actions into account in one's decisions.

Transfiguration: Christ allowed His divine glory to appear before the eyes of the Apostles Peter, James and John, thus confirming His divine nature.

Transubstantiation: signifies the conversion of the bread and of the wine into the body and the blood of Jesus Christ at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There is therefore a double miracle at the moment of the consecration: the changing of the substance, with the persistence of the accidents: texture, taste, smell: the appearances.

Unction: the act of anointing (see Anoint).

Unitive way: (see Purgative, illuminative or unitive way)

Viaticum: from *via*, the road. Sacrament of the Eucharist received by a sick person at the end of his life, that his earthly path might end with entry into Heaven.

Vigilance: attitude recommended by Jesus Christ which consists in being aware of the dangers that life on earth entails and avoiding

the occasions of sin in order to be able to attain happiness in Heaven.

Virtues (theological): supernatural virtues which have God as their object, namely, faith, hope and charity.

Wedding feast (eternal): metaphor used by Christ to signify Paradise.

World: it may be considered as a creature of God and, under that aspect, it is good (*cf. Gn. 1:25, 31*). "But the world is a theological and moral entity, with its own wisdom, its own mentality, its own desires, where the Christian is always in danger of perdition," writes Fr. Spicq.⁷ The prevailing current of the modern world leads man to develop an excessive love of pleasure at the expense of duty and the higher goods, and a disordered love of the present life at the expense of the future life. It is in this sense that the world is condemned by Jesus in the Gospel.

⁷ Ceslas Spicq, O.P., *Théologie Morale du Nouveau Testament (Moral Theology of the New Testament)*, J. Gabalda and Company, Paris, 1970, p. 213.

Laus Deo
Virginique Matri
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