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**The Consecrated Study of Priests,  
Growing 'Friendship with Jesus Christ  
and the Grand Jubilee**

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### **The Consecrated Study of Priests, Growing Friendship with Jesus Christ and the Grand Jubilee**

A challenge directed to the early Church in Philippi might well serve as a context of the special appeal of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. This holds true for the laity, for religious as well as for priests - but the main concern here is the priesthood. Contemplative study of sacred doctrine is a decisive step toward a revitalized experience of priestly fidelity as preparation for the «New Evangelization». The invitation for all is to «put on the mind of Christ Jesus!» (cf. Ph 2:5). Faithfulness as well as creativity are simultaneously required - the need is to hold on to the Tradition, for the New Evangelization in the committed efforts to serve the Church perceptively at the dawn of the New Millennium, her third.

While Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8) - yet, He has made all things new (cf. Rv 21:5). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is, who was and yet is still to come (cf. Rv 1:8, 14; 21:6; 22:13; cf. Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). In this context, the head of the household brings from his storeroom both the new and the old (cf. Mt 13:52) - and the Church has the assurance of the Holy Spirit that the one who began this good work in us will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus (cf. Ph 1:6) - that our love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and in every kind of perception (v. 9). In imitation of her divine Founder, the Church herself needs not only to move ahead through the centuries, but also is called to develop in wisdom and favor before God and man (cf. Lk 2:40, 52): a constant harmony of old and new.

The Second Vatican Council has ushered in what is looked upon as «a special advent time of grace». In her Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Church teaches:

**It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet in-visibly endowed, eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it. She is all these things in such a way that in her the human is *directed and subordinated* to the divine - the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek ... (cf. Heb 13:14) »<sup>1</sup>**

The dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation put it this way:

**... there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience,**

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<sup>1</sup> SC 2.

**and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession *the sure gift of truth ...*»<sup>2</sup>.**

In the rich magisterial teaching of this present decade, there is a most important Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II: *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992) regarding priests. Along with the human, spiritual and pastoral formation, there is clear insistence on the intellectual needs of the Church from her priests as the new millennium approaches<sup>3</sup>. Truly essential is the prayerful meditated reading of the divine word - a loving knowledge of this, a prayerful familiarity with it. In sharing the filial conversation of the life of the Trinity, the priest is called to be learns at this «school». Such a life is admittedly an interior life, one of prayer and contemplation – along with study.

To this needs to be added a preparation to make a defense of the faith and to account for the hope that is on us (cf. 1 Pt 3: 15). The challenges addressed to the Church need to be met in a manner that is credible to the legitimate demands of human intelligence. In assenting to the word of God and through study, the priest can grow in his own spiritual life – there is asked and integrated spiritual life marked by one's own personal experience of God. The priests' knowledge has as its goal to bring about a personal relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ – all need to participate in the wisdom of Christ Himself. All this is listed among the «essential components» for the new evangelization. In an age of extraordinary technology and professionalism among the laity, there is the constant danger to play down the seriousness of sacred study and commitment to it – especially in the light of the shortage of priests in some areas, and on any exaggerated, unilateral stress on ministerial skills.

The «*Splendor of the Truth*»<sup>4</sup> enlightens human intelligence and shapes freedom. The faithful witness of martyrs has blessed the Church in fidelity to the revealed moral code and to her teaching.<sup>5</sup> The confirmed testimony of the saints adds a specific note to the holiness of the Church and the sacred nature of her truth.

The month of May 1995 saw the emanation of two important pontifical documents. *The Light of the East*<sup>6</sup> is dated on the Feast of Athanasias. The witness and shared memories of charity, expressed through martyrdom in both east and west, can assist the process of ecumenism<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, the Latin Church, in particular, is presented with the mandate of conversion - Peter himself is invited

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<sup>2</sup> DV 8.

<sup>3</sup> These are inter-connected; cf. especially the « spiritual» (# #45, ff.) and the «intellectual» (cf. ##51, ff.).

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Veritatis Splendor*. August 6, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> VS ## 90, ff.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Lumen Orientale*. May 2, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> ## 24, 25.

personally into this endless process - true union between East and West depends upon total respect for the other's dignity. Again, western communities are asked to appreciate more, also through an improved knowledge of the facts, the exhausting efforts of the east<sup>8</sup>, as well as their rich doctrinal and spiritual heritage.

The Pope's Encyclical Letter, *On Commitment to Ecumenism*<sup>9</sup> makes a strong point of common Martyrology as a means of ecumenism<sup>10</sup>, as this faithful witness contributes mightily to the dialogue of conversion all need. Even the ministry of Peter is included in this letter – in the gospel, Peter is challenged with conversion, and reminded that his is a mission of mercy – he is something of a «sentinel» for unity.<sup>11</sup> While the Papacy is a matter of dogma for Catholics, the manner of its being exercised may change with the times. True ecumenism demands knowledge of the others' doctrine as well as a deeper grasp of one's own position. For any of this to succeed, «the dialogue of conversion»<sup>12</sup> needs to draw committed participants into a completely interior «spiritual space»<sup>13</sup>.

The most recent promulgation of the official Latin text of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>14</sup> speaks of the five years since the Church's first doctrinal compendium in four centuries saw the light of day. The Latin text has benefited by observations from around the world in this period, which have been incorporated into what is meant to be the final text. The Pope's Letter expresses his conviction that the new Catechism needs to play its unique role in the appeal for the New Evangelization for the dawn of the Third Millennium.

All of this is based on the hope that the Church, and her ministers, will undertake the intellectual and spiritual renewal upon which her success depends so much in the Third Millennium of her life. On-going formation is the equivalent of continuing conversion for all who are called to serve the Church as her ministers.

### **Continuing Creative Renewal in Fidelity**

The challenge of apparent opposites, clear paradoxes, is very clear to anyone who seriously undertakes the following of Christ - through Him the world was made, yet the world did not know him (cf. Jn 1:10) - He truly is the Saviour of the world (cf. Jn 4:42) - yet, His kingdom is not of this world (cf. Jn 17:36). The spiritual life has its

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<sup>8</sup> # # 20, 21, 24. The Catholic faith in the Papacy was defined in Vatican I. The manner however, of its exercise may be reviewed; cf. *Agendi Ratio in Doctrinarum Examine*. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, (9) June 29, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*. May 25, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> # 84.

<sup>11</sup> ## 91, ff.

<sup>12</sup> # 84.

<sup>13</sup> # 82.

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Laetamur Magnopere*. August 15, 1997.

innumerable oxymorons – the «wisdom of the saints» also involves the harmonizing of the many antinomies<sup>15</sup>: principle of totality/yet, we are dust; development and yet crucifixion of one's human nature; immersion in the world and flight from it; contemplation in action; humility balanced with a life-long development of one's talents, sense of self worth. These can almost be multiplied at will:

- obedience / freedom;
- horizontal / vertical;
- already / not yet;
- letter / spirit;
- victims / yet, royal people;
- incarnationism / eschatologism;
- unity / pluralism;
- rights / duties;
- dogma / mystery;
- «*rassourcement*» / «*aggiornamento*».

The challenge here would seem to be synthesized, without compromise - there cannot be stark separation, as between: «either/or»; in so many instances the solution for the Church remains in her «both/and» approach - by coordination, and at times subordination of truths and values, as is taught by the II<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. The Church is a «net», and the Deposit of Faith is not a metal box.

In the spiritual life, as well as in the intellectual world, these paradoxes appear in a wide variety of directions:

- nothing new under the sun (cf. Qo 1:9) yet, there are new heavens and a new earth (cf. Is 65:17; 66:22; 2 P 3:13; Rv 21:1, ff.);
- memorial/promise;
- tradition/ renewal;
- *non nova/ sed noviter*;
- formulation/reality of the mystery;
- history /prophecy;
- wholeness of Tradition/newness of Council;
- institution/ charism;

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<sup>15</sup> Carolus V. Trulhar, SJ, *Antinomiae Vitae Spiritualis*. Romae: Gregoriana 1965.

- definitions/better expression-more successful adaptation.

In different ways, and by different scholars, caution is always urged as recently, John Macquarrie, the Oxford theologian, in comparing the act of faith according to Cardinal Newman and Kierkegaard, stated:

**... there are no labels that fit exactly and exhaustively, and no people who conform wholly to the typological schema we have set up. In each individual different characteristics are combined in a unique way, and we have to pay much attention to the differences between that individual and another, as to the similarities between them...**<sup>16</sup>

In the matter of the faith, we are constantly reminded of these insightful words of St. Thomas Aquinas: the act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in a (divine) reality. For, as in science, we do not form propositions, except in order to have knowledge about things through their means; so it is in faith<sup>17</sup>. The articles of the Creed are a perception, a «glimpse» of the divine truth tending toward it<sup>18</sup>.

In his Apostolic Constitution defining the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, Pope Pius IXth expressed himself this way:

**«... For the Church of Christ, watchful guardian that she is, and defender of the dogmas deposited with her, never changes anything, never diminishes anything, never adds anything to them; but with all diligence she treats the ancient documents faithfully and wisely; if they really are of ancient origin and if the faith of the Fathers has transmitted them, she strives to investigate and explain them in such a way that the ancient dogmas of heavenly doctrine will be made evident and clear, but will retain their full, integral and proper nature, and will grow only within their genus - that is, within the same dogma, in the same sense and the same meaning...»**<sup>19</sup>

In the Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius*, the First Vatican Council placed its emphasis on the «divine deposition to be faith-fully guarded ... perpetually retained ... infallibly defined». Yet, the Council expressed the prayerful wish the believers' and the Church's understanding «grow and progress strongly» - and always in the same dogma, sense and understanding<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> John Macquarrie, «Newman and Kierkegaard on the Act of Faith», in *Newman and Conversion*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1997, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> *Summa*, 2-2, 1, 2, ad 2um; / Sent. bk. 1, d. 24, a. 1, qua. 2; *De Ver.* 14, 8, ad Sum.

<sup>18</sup> *Summa*, 2-2, 1, 6, *Sed Contra*.

<sup>19</sup> Pope PIUS IX, Apostolic Constitution, *Ineffabilis Deus*. December 8, 1954. Eng. tr. Boston: St. Paul, p. 12. DS # 2802; cf. *Syllabus Errorum*. DS # 2912; Pope Benedict XV, Encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*. November 1, 1914; DS # 3626.

<sup>20</sup> DS ## 3020; 3043. Cf. also Pope Pius X, *Iuramentum Anti-Modernisticum*. DS # 3541.

In his own process of conversion, Cardinal Newman chanced upon a very unusual metaphor describing the Catholic Church's uniformity in faith. He looked upon the papal sceptre as a kind of blunt instrument for smiting the intellects and wills of believers in the «moral factory» which the Church is! Newman made the comparison of the mythological forging of Vulcan's sturdy shield for battle - and Solomon's Temple (cf. 1 K 5-6; 2 Ch 2). In the building of the Temple, neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool, or iron, was heard - both the community and each individual are called to be God's perfect Temple<sup>21</sup>.

In some ways, Newman experienced more difficulties in the Church he joined over the one he was leaving. It might even be said that dignity and good taste were not always the qualities he found in Catholicism. However, for what he did find, there can be no substitute: he found «life». This, for him, proved to be true whether it was in the popular devotions in the local Churches, or the hidden contemplation of the enclosed cloisters<sup>22</sup>. He might be best seen as striking the middle course, as St. Anselm before him, between being interpreted as a *fideist* and a *rationalist*<sup>23</sup>.

In his study of the early Fathers, Newman was like the Ante-Nicene Father, and many others, for whom the quest for faith was a kind of prolepsis, a forward projection - faith consents to the mystery of the hidden God, thus bringing about a union with the invisible. His was an assent based on trust - in trusting, one assents to the Word<sup>24</sup>. Pondering Augustine's idea that faith was *cogitare cum assensu*, Newman's was long a searching investigation, a probing consideration, conferring with oneself before deciding; a long-experienced reaching out for what was not yet his. In brief, his was a protracted, but healthy life-giving, «mental unrest»<sup>25</sup>. From his own experience, he was convinced of Christ's words that he personally was among the «all» lifted up by Christ raised on the Cross and in the resurrection (cf. Jn 12:32)<sup>26</sup>.

Newman was truly fascinated by «development», permeating every aspect of human existence. He was actually more directly drawn by «development of doctrine», which, however, simply offered a gauge for his interior spiritual development. The Church is a community of believers - development is an indication of greater intensity in the life of the Church. His was neither sentimentalism, nor sheer rationalism. Genuine development would have these characteristics:

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<sup>21</sup> RONALD BEGLEY, «Metaphor in the "Apologia" and Newman's Conversion», in: *Newman and Conversion*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1997, pp. 59, ff.

<sup>22</sup> IAN KERR, «Newman's Post-Conversion Discovery of Catholicism», in: *Newman and Conversion*. Edinburgh: Assurance of T. Things & T. Clark 1997, p. 59, ff.

<sup>23</sup> AVERY DULLES, SJ, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for. A Theology of Christian Faith*. New York / Oxford University Press 1994, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> DULLES, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> DULLES, p. 232.

<sup>26</sup> DULLES, p. 271.

- a mature readiness to submit to objective truth;
- a confident accepting of the fact that life might be one of conflict and apparent failure;
- there has to be an integration of feeling with thinking.

The journey toward faith is being drawn toward *something* - the journey in faith is that one has come to believe in, and to love *Someone*. The act of faith in the Trinity, for instance, is not so much in the dogma - but in the One revealing it. «Conversion» is not simply a commencement, but a «process», a gradual changing. The life of grace brings one into a project, and a life-long Exodus journey, of divine influence and sanctification. Grace both strengthens the will and heals understanding. Spiritual development includes the on-going conversion, the gradual transformation of both mind and heart. There are various similarities in the ways that the «development of doctrine» and the «development of personal holiness» happen in one:

- both are a progressive receding from extremes;
- both involve a movement from what is present, implicit or an explicit expression;
- both take time;
- growth is more than change - it is comparable to the discernment of spirits.

It is always helpful to measure one's own ideas against the opinions of other persons we respect. The judgment of the wise assists us in waiting for the consent of the many. Duration is a good test of truth, providing the mind continues its life-long quest for clarification. «The ability to develop is a sign of life: a mere formula either does not expand, or is shattered in the expanding». The intellectual assent of faith is based on the identification with the Divine Speaker, Who bears witness to Himself<sup>27</sup>.

The Second Vatican Council offers a more comprehensive view of «faith», expanding on the ideas of Trent and Vatican I:

**«... The obedience of faith» (Rm 16:26; cf. 1:5; 2 Co 10:5-6) must be given to God, who reveals an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering «the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals» and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him...<sup>28</sup>**

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. WILLIAM FEY, «Development of Doctrine and the Spiritual Development of the Believer», in: *John Henry Newman. 1801-1890*. Louvain Studies. Summer-Fall 1990, pp. 166-187, passim.

<sup>28</sup> DV 5.



Christian Faith asks for a total response to God's total Gift of Self in Jesus Christ - Faith is living His life (cf. Ga 2:20). It is a life-long movement toward total Good, toward the total Truth resounding in the depths of the human heart. While always fragile, free and threatened, this Faith is paradoxically the most firm and the most assured<sup>29</sup>. It is a «total condition», the encounter of one's whole person with the revealing God. Faith is presented as a listening, an obeying, a yielding, a hoping and a trusting, a recognition and a knowledge of the Divine - love is also one of its constitutional elements - a trustful submission, including an abandonment to God<sup>30</sup>.

The classical Thomists maintain that nothing can be loved unless it is first known - the students of St. Bonaventure might add that nothing, or no one, is ever known deeply unless first loved. Faith «wants», «needs» to understand because it is motivated by love: not only does the «faith seek to be understood», but love does as well. Love is the yearning for intimate knowledge - there is always a coherence of love and truth<sup>31</sup>. Authentic truth (or love) is never monotonous - no single form expresses it fully. The human mind grasps only fragments. Hence, it needs to be bestowed on the ecclesial community, where its on-going, deepening grasp is built on history. Often the Church protecting and guarding it becomes a sign of contradiction, her true vocation<sup>32</sup>.

### **An Increasing Understanding**

Sacred Scripture has within it a progressive idea from Creation itself, spread out over six days - through the Exodus experience of early Israel that has imprinted itself forever on the minds and hearts of believers. There is an «Itinerary of the Mind (and Heart)» toward God that permeates so much of God's word. The truly wise will advance in learning, will gain sound guidance to ponder the words of the wise and their riddles (cf. Pr 1:5, f.).

The Gospels plead that the disciple become like the teacher (cf. Mt 10:28, f.). The Parable of the Talents directs the recipient to develop them, and not allow them to lie fallow in the ground (cf. Mt 25: 14-30). How many times the disciples of the Lord through the centuries have prayed with the Apostles: Increase our faith! (cf. Lk 17:5). John's frequent use of the accompanying Spirit of Truth encourages us all to believe that the Church will be guided to all truth - He will speak of the things that are coming (cf. Jn 16:12, f.).

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<sup>29</sup> A. DULLES, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> A. DULLES, pp. 150, 187.

<sup>31</sup> Cardinal JOSEPH RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology. Approaches to Understanding its Role in the Light of Present Controversy*. San Francisco: Ignatius 1995, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Cardinal RATZINGER, pp. 97, f., 104, 118.

Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, the progressive following of Christ is commonly called the «Way»: in the beginning Paul wanted to persecute those who belonged to «the Way» (cf. 9:2), which he later confessed with deep regret: «I persecuted the Way to death» (cf. 22:4). Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos (an eloquent speaker) aside and explained to him the «Way» (cf. 18:26). The task of the early Church was not always an easy one: some disparaged it, and disturbances broke out concerning this «Way» (cf. 19:9, 23). Paul confessed before Felix the Governor that he worshipped the God of his ancestors, in accord with the «Way», often thought of as a sect, but in agreement with the Law and Prophets. The Governor was accurately informed about the Way (cf. 24:14, 22).

Throughout the «Pauline Corpus» there is abundant testimony of this inherent «Law of Progress», «the Exodus spirituality», implanted into the hearts and minds of the early faithful, and was part and parcel of the early community. In one of his earlier letters, Paul thanked God for the faith of the Thessalonians, flourishing ever more. He always prayed for them that God may make them all worthy of His calling and power- fully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort (2 Th 1:3, 11).

Creation itself is groaning in one great act of giving birth to new life (cf. Rm 8:22, f.). Paul prayed to the God of endurance and encouragement to think in harmony in keeping with Christ, and that all would abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 15:5, 13). All are being transformed into the same image of God's glory (cf. 2 Co 3:18).

The Church is a building under construction on the foundation of the Apostles, with Christ as the corner-stone. The whole structure grows into a Temple sacred to the Lord, being built together as His dwelling place (cf. Ep. 2:20-22). The inner self of believers needs to be strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit. Strength will be imparted to comprehend and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge (cf. Ep 3:16-19). The goal of the apostolic mission of the Church is to build up the Body of Christ, until mature adulthood, to the full stature of Jesus Christ. Living the truth in love brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love. All need to grow in every way into Him Who is the Head, Christ Jesus (cf. Ep 4:11-16).

The present is only the beginning - this good work will be carried through by the One Who initiated it (cf. Ph 1:6). Despite struggles in the early Church, Paul continued his pursuit in hope, by straining forward to what lies ahead, struggling onward like the long-distance runner, toward the ultimate goal, the prize of God's upward calling (Ph 3:12-16).

Fullness resides in Christ Jesus (cf. Col 1:19). The ministry is to encourage the hearts of believers brought together in love, to have all the richness of fully assured

understanding for the knowledge of the mystery of God. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (cf. Col 2:2, f.). We need to put on the new self, which is constantly being renewed for knowledge in the image of the Creator (cf. Col 3:10, f.).

The testing of faith produces perseverance, that needs to be perfected, that nothing be found wanting (cf. Jm 1:2-4). Peter instructs the early Church to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 P 3:18). The keeper of the Word will find that the love of God will be perfected within (cf. 1 Jn 2:5). All need to build themselves up in the most holy faith (Jud v. 20).

Believers are now even more convinced - largely through the contribution of Cardinal Newman – that «*development*» is a life-long spiritual, as well as intellectual, process<sup>33</sup>. This continues, with no signs of waning, proceeding from implicit awareness to explicit articulation, and onward, toward further elaboration and expansion of doctrine<sup>34</sup>. Newman saw «*life*» as a mark of the true Church<sup>35</sup>.

Aidan Nichols, OP, has presented an insightful study of Newman's Idea of Doctrinal Development<sup>36</sup>. He offers much for reflection especially in the joining of the development of doctrine and progress in the spiritual life. The human mind is unequal to the mysteries of the Church. Growth in holiness is a necessary condition for growth in the knowledge of God - decline in holiness brings about a doctrinal decline. A truly sound understanding of Christian revelation depends on growth in holiness. The condition of a sound grasp of the inner tradition is holiness, purity of heart<sup>37</sup>.

There is noted within a certain «*connatural*», or «*sympathetic*» way of knowing, when one's life comes more and more to exhibit what is defined. As the Church ponders Jesus Christ through the centuries in accord with the signs of the times, the propositional definitions are not so much «*new cognitions*», as «*recognition*»<sup>38</sup>.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* rather abundantly offers its teaching in this regard. The clear principle is that Revelation is already complete, but it has not yet been made completely explicit (# 66). This develops an idea taken from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church: «... the Church is being enriched by the

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<sup>33</sup> NICHOLAS L ASH, *Newman on Development: The Search for an Explanation*. London: Sheed & Ward. stag Books 1975.

<sup>34</sup> N. LASH, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> N. LASH, p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> AIDAN NICHOLS, OP, *From Newman to Congar. The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1990.

<sup>37</sup> NICHOLS, OP, pp. 27, ff.

<sup>38</sup> NICHOLS, OP, p. 203.

evolution of social life - not as if something were missing in the constitution which Christ gave the Church but in order to understand this constitution more deeply, express it better, and adapt it more successfully ... »<sup>39</sup>.

There is an organic connection between the spiritual life and dogmas - which are compared to lights along the path. In the upright life, intellect and heart work together to welcome the light of dogma (CCC 89, 94). This also flows from the interconnections between the dogmas, and their coherence (CCC 90).

As the Heart of Christ was opened in the Passion, so, too, are the Scriptures with which this is easily compared. Sacred Scripture is written even more in the Church's heart than in her documents or records (CCC 112, f.). The Trinity is the core of it all - salvation history is identical with the history of the way in which the Trinity is revealed, and reconciles with those who turn away from sin (CCC 234).

«Faith seeks understanding» - it is simply intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the one in Whom he places his trust. A more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by His gifts, that Revelation might be the more profoundly understood (CCC 158).

The Church's tradition on prayer has often coupled «contemplation and study» (cf. DV 8). One of the ways in which the tradition of faith takes shape and grows is especially through the contemplation and study of believers (CCC 2651). The ancient monastic tradition paraphrased Mt 7:7: «Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation» (CCC 2654)<sup>40</sup>.

Meditation is primarily a quest as the mind seeks to understand what is the ultimate support of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to whatever the Lord may ask. While this is difficult to sustain, we are helped by the Sacred Scriptures icons, liturgical texts, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, creation and history (cf. CCC 2705).

It might be well here to recall the Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests:

**In the sacred rite of ordination, the bishop admonishes priests to be «mature in knowledge», and to make their doctrine «a spiritual medicine for**

<sup>39</sup> Cf. GS 44.2. Cf. also *The Companion to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. A Compendium of Texts Referred to in the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. San Francisco: Ignatius 1994, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> *Companion to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 921-928 for the extended text of Guido the Carthusian, *Scala Claustralium*, his only text in the entire Catechism, and is one of the longest of the entire *Compendium*.

**God's people». The knowledge of a sacred minister should be sacred, since it is drawn from a sacred fountain is directed to a sacred goal (PO 19).**

One of the commonly used images for the new Catechism is that of a «symphony». In promulgating the new Catechism<sup>41</sup>, the Holy Father expresses his joy for «the harmony of so many voices» and that these truly express «what could be called the "symphony" of the faith». The Holy Father quotes this expression again in his Latin Apostolic Letter, *Laetamur Magnopere*<sup>42</sup>. This idea of the «symphony» might also be noted in the early chapters of *The Intellectual Life* by Sertillanges. It is further developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar<sup>43</sup>.

Cardinal Ratzinger offers his explanation of this idea of the «symphony» of doctrine as a great help in balancing the paradoxes as well as playing its role in the plural structure of inner Church unity. He sees four levels:

- the unity of the two Testaments, the old and the new: the unity within the these testaments, with the different kinds of traditions and writings;
- unity among Christians that can only come from the Holy Spirit;
- unity with God that is beyond and above, and presupposed for social harmony;
- internal unity, that of body and soul<sup>44</sup>. The wide-spread inner strife that needs to be healed, as St. Paul points out: in his « unspiritual self», he often does what he does not really want to do and can only be rescued from the body doomed to death by Jesus Christ (cf. Rm 7:14, ff.).

In our own time, there are so many «dialectic factors» in contrast with the Christian message - the attack on the family; the views concerning human work and industry; the confusion on what is true happiness; ecological struggles; the pervasive mind-set, fundamental options chosen through a kind of misty Neo-Gnosticism. The late Hans Urs von Balthasar calls his theology: «Theo-Drama», always in relationship. The basic dual unity of human life is most often extremely confused as between body/soul; man/woman; humanity/cosmos; «We»/«I»<sup>45</sup>. These tensions might be noted in the dual unity of: universal Church/particular churches; primary/episcopacy;

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<sup>41</sup> Pope JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*. October 11, 1992, # 1, p. 4 of the English translation.

<sup>42</sup> Pope JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Laetamur Magnopere*. August 15, 1997, the approbation and promulgation of the Typical Latin edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

<sup>43</sup> HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Truth is Symphonic. Aspects of Christian Pluralism*. San Francisco: Ignatius 1987.

<sup>44</sup> JOSEPH Cardinal RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, pp. 83, ff.

<sup>45</sup> †ANGELO SCOLA, Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University. Remarks on May 9, 1997. Congregation for the Clergy.

bishops/priests; theology/theologies; institution/charism – and so many other possibilities.

The body which is the Church is made up of many members (cf. 1 Co 12:14, ff.) - «sym-phony» means sounding together - it is by no means a sickly sweet harmony lacking tension. The Church's reservoir is the depth of the riches of God (cf. 1 Co 2:10-15)<sup>46</sup> that need to be pondered and treasured in the priestly heart, in imitation of Mary (cf. Lk 2:19, 51).

Pure Catholic Theology is not only memorization, repetition, or «swallowing the Catechism unchewed». It requires prayer, reflection, probing, wondering searching ... so our intellectual assent can be as free and sincere as possible. Such is the vocation of a man «in theology».

### **The Deepening Experience of a Growing Friendship with Jesus Christ**

«... The way we can be sure of our knowledge of Christ is to keep his commandments... whoever keeps his word, truly has the love of God made perfect in him. The way we can be sure we are in union with him is for the man who claims to: abide in him to conduct himself just as he did ... » (cf. 1 Jn 2:3, ff.).

The Catechism places this challenge before the entire Church as a means of achieving life in Christ:

**In the work of teaching and applying Christian morality, the Church needs the dedication of Pastors, the knowledge of theologians, and the contribution of all Christians and men of good will. Faith and the practice of the Gospel provide each person with an experience of life in Christ, who enlightens him and makes him able to evaluate the divine and human realities according to the Spirit of God. Thus, the Holy Spirit can use the humblest to enlighten the learned, and those in the highest positions<sup>47</sup>.**

The solemn proclamation on the Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux, as a «Doctress of the Church», invites the entire Church to reflect on the unique contribution of her Fathers, her Doctors and her Doctresses. Their own increase of understanding of the Word of God, and personal intimacy with Him are a clear testimony of how the God of all knowledge has gifted the whole Church through them. In this context, it is almost natural to think of St. Thomas Aquinas, Patron of her Schools: « ... the Church pursues the goal (of seeing how faith and reason give harmonious witness to the unity for all truth) after the manner of her most illustrious teachers, especially St. Thomas Aquinas» (GE 10).

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<sup>46</sup> VON BALTHASAR, *Truth is Symphonic*, pp. 7, ff.

<sup>47</sup> CCC # 2038.

The «Angelic Doctor» is likewise a «Spiritual Master» - in his life has to be both theological and spiritual - his is truly a Trinitarian spirit, one that strives to plummet the depths of the Grace of Union in Jesus Christ between the divinity and humanity; the Holy Spirit is the great interior Teacher; Creation is both a revelation and communication of God Himself - we truly share in the divine life of God living the life of grace<sup>48</sup>. The Eucharist is the heart of the Church.

Theology is truly an evangelical function. It comes together with dedicated prayer in that both may truly be considered as the life-long quest for God. This concentrated search is solely to make Him known, loved and followed, which only truly happens when what is taught, preached, has first been contemplated. Prayer and study come together in the discovery of God in the depths of each person - in some way, Jesus Christ is united to each human being (cf. GS 22). Contemplative theology truly encounters Jesus Christ in person<sup>49</sup>.

The Angelic Doctor's God-given talent to live and think in proximity of the Gospel enabled him to present theology as a «science». In Thomas' approach, the heart of the «Good News» was the words and deeds of Jesus Christ leading personally to Him. The love of God is the soul of all contemplation, joined to love for neighbor, and every neighbor. It is this same charity that inspires the apostolic mission. Faith is both assent and quest - of its very nature, sacred study is a life-long research project: as the thirst for God is slaked, it leads to a deeper, more sublime quest - the hunger for the Word of God is satisfied, it leads to a deeper gnawing in the mind and heart<sup>50</sup>.

For Fr. Avery Dulles, St. Thomas teaches both an intensive as well as extensive growth in faith. Intensively, one can experience a more complete and explicit knowledge of what is to be believed; when the believer's assent becomes more certain and steadfast; when one believes with greater devotion and trust. In some way, faith increases extensively by a more explicit awareness of content. The faith of the Apostles was often considered by Jesus Christ in his response to their prayer: Increase our faith Lk 17:5). Jesus noted the «little faith» of His followers (cf. Mt 6:30; 8:26; 14:3; 16:8; 17:20; Lk 12:28) – as well as admired the «great faith» of others who were not (cf. Mt 8:10; 15:28). For St. Paul, it was part of his apostolic mission to concern himself with the faith of the early Church: the need: the need of «solid food» (cf. 1 Co 3:1, ff.); its insufficiency in some quarters (cf. 1 Co 13:2); its different measures (cf. Rm 12:6); the need for progress and joy (cf. Ph 1:25). He prayed for

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<sup>48</sup> JEAN-PIERRE TORREL, OP, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Maître Spirituel. Initiation 2*. Fribourg/Paris: Editions Universitaires. Suisse/du Cerf 1996.

<sup>49</sup> MICHEL DE PAILLERTS, OP, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Frère, Prêcher, Théologien*. Paris : du Cerf 1992.

<sup>50</sup> A. DULLES, SJ, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, pp. 243-249, passim.

advance in wisdom and understanding for the early communities (cf. Col 1:9; 2:2, f.; Ep 1:9 17 f.)<sup>51</sup>.

Perhaps remembering his own conversion process, Fr. Dulles offers unique insights into «the Anatomy of Newman's Conversion»: in moving from one position to the next, it is not so much the result of a syllogism as it is a response to the spiritual experience involving emotions and the imagination. The heart as well as the head needs to be drawn. Newman was imbued with the aphorisms of his own time: holiness before peace - growth is the only evidence of life. While Roman Catholicism might through periods of exhaustion and repose, it rises again, refreshed and restored. Its changes are not alien to its nature, but consolidations, adaptations of what it has always been. Several basic principles seem to be emerged:

- the importance of keeping one's heart and imagination in tune with the gospel message;
- the value of concrete experience and personal witness to lead one forward in the quest for the truth;
- the avoidance of hasty, ill-conceived decisions;
- to go beyond private judgment through submission of will and intellect to a divine accredited origin<sup>52</sup>. It is interesting that DV 5 calls for the order of (first), «the full submission of intellect (then the) will to God who reveals» (citing Vatican I) - in LG 25, the order is reversed: « ... a religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*».

«Authentic Conversion» is not simply «change for change's sake», as Sheridan Gilkey notes:

**... And how often has that fateful sentence from An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine: « ... to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often» - been left without its introductory clauses, and twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, who can be induced to think that any old change must be a step toward perfection...!**<sup>53</sup>

The «spiritual mind» includes both the philosophical mind and also the heart. «What von Balthasar emphasizes about Newman is in the first place, his experiential,

<sup>51</sup> A. DULLES, SJ, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, pp. 243-249, passim.

<sup>52</sup> AVERY DULLES, SJ, «Newman: The Anatomy of a Conversion», in: *Newman and Conversion*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1997, pp. 22, 25, 32, ff., passim.

<sup>53</sup> SHERIDAN GILKEY, «Newman and the Convert Mind», in: *Newman and Conversion*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1997, pp. 10, 16.



*cordial* («of the heart») and holistic approach to the Gospel of Christ... With Newman, the heart is the foundation of the intellect, not its rival...»<sup>54</sup>: *Cor ad cor loquitur!*

There is an intimate, unbreakable link in both Paul and John between believing and knowing. «Knowledge», as is held by biblical scholars, is not a mere theoretical grasp of an objective kind, but is an intimate personal relationship - almost nuptial or better: as the Trinitarian union. For John, belief leads to knowledge (cf. Jn 4:39-42; 10:38) - and knowledge leads to faith (cf. Jn 16:30; 17:8; 1 Jn 4:16) - faith is a new mode of knowing<sup>55</sup>.

These principles have wide biblical support: for the Samaritans' «knowledge» that Jesus was the «Saviour of the World» (cf. Jn 4:42) - there is a gradual «coming» to believe (cf. Jn 6:69) - there is mutual «knowledge» between the Good Shepherd and His own (cf. Jn 10:14, ff.) - authentic «belief» does not come merely from the answer to questions (cf. Jn 16:30) - the Apostles eventually know and believe from the message entrusted to them (cf. Jn 17:8) - through His love, we come to «know and believe» that this is so (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16).

Progress, growth in doctrine cannot be «change for change's sake» - at times, there has been a «misty neo-Gnostic» in the history of the Church. «Social Change», a «shift in paradigms», some vague «historical consciousness», «the principle of relativity»: are not points of departure for the grasp of that doctrine leading to eternal life - there can be no «radical break» from Sacred Tradition<sup>56</sup>.

Almost a half century ago, Rudolf Bultmann offered an incisive study on the authentic Biblical Gnosis<sup>57</sup>, which still invites the serious reflection of students of the Word of God. Biblical knowledge arises from a concrete relationship, from experience, implying a practical discernment. It is also result of a certain investigation, a coming to «knowledge». In «theologizing» history, the biblical writers are inspired to encouraging a covenant relationship with God. Biblical knowledge always has within it the affective, volitive dimension - to come to «know» the Lord will mean a deeper recognition, an obedience, a worshipping awe, or prayerful fear of the Lord. God indeed becomes the «life-choice» of a people, that must be cared for, nurtured.

<sup>54</sup> AIDAN NICHOLS, OP, «Littlemore from Lucerne: Newman's *Essay on Development* in Balthasarian Perspective», in: *Newman and Conversion*. Edinburgh: T & T. Clark 1997, pp. 104, f.

<sup>55</sup> A. DULLES, SJ, *Assurance of Things Hoped For*, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> JANET SMITH, «*Humanae Vitae*» *A Generation Later*. Washington DC: CUA Press 1991, pp. 181, ff. Cf. also PAUL JOHNSON, *Modern Times. The World from the Twenties to the Eighties*. New York: Harper & Row 1983, especially Chapter 1.

<sup>57</sup> RUDOLF BULTMANN, *GNOSIS*. Biblical Key Words from Gerhard Kittel's *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963.

With the Incarnation, this «knowledge» becomes the experience of the salvific reality - knowledge of the truth will always ask for a change of heart. This experience of the Incarnate Mercy of God inspires the making of choices, decisions in behalf of the Church. Christian gnosis is an ideal including a devout recognition, humble attestation, both speculative and loving, of God, His will, His Plan.

It is a «grace» that permeates and marks the Christian «Way». As cooperating members of the Body of the Lord, the «new man» sets aside the «former way» and is renewed in knowledge. This is not some vague, philosophical speculation, but is a personal share in divine wisdom. The existential dimension of such knowledge is abandonment to His Will, to His Person. This knowledge of Jesus Christ sheds its own light on the Trinitarian relationship within God Himself, inviting a personal communion with and among those who are open to it.

This will challenge the disciple, the student of Jesus as Teacher, to recognize attentively, and to observe perceptively, deliberately, His way of life, His Witness. Such knowledge always includes a choice of the will, and the appeal is to heed and to make the proclamation. Authentic Christian knowledge is a service, it is worship rendered to God.

Such knowledge is not of a secondary nature, it is the «one thing necessary» - it offers its own share in the life of the Most Blessed Trinity. Loving knowledge involves relationship - in Jesus it is obedience to the Father's Will; in the Holy Spirit, it is to remind us of Jesus Christ. Such knowledge leads to eternal life. This experience of Jesus Christ presupposes, intensifies, lives the theological life - it is grace that unites one with an ever deeper share in God's own nature (cf. 2 P 1:4). Its eschatological dimensions are clear: « ... this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and the one Whom You sent, Jesus Christ...» (cf. Jn 17:3).

In June of 1948, a doctoral thesis was defended at the ANGELICUM in Rome with the title: *Doctrina de Fide apud S. Joannem a Cruce*<sup>58</sup>. Among the propositions expounded in this thesis, submitted by a young priest from the Archdiocese of Krakow, were the following: the works of the Doctor of Church are not speculative treatises, but mystical experience, a participation in the intimate life of the Blessed Trinity. The truths treated in speculative theology can be expressed much more vividly after one has actually experienced them. There will always be an infinite number of ways to imitate Christ, and to know him more intimately. Revealed truths are given to the intellect, but it is Christ Himself Who is given as the life of Christians.

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<sup>58</sup> KAROL WOJTYLA, *Faith according to Saint John of the Cross*, tr. by Jordan Aumann, OP, San Francisco: Ignatius 1981, pp. 21, f., 48, f., 52, 58, 168, 174, 237, 263, passim.

## Conclusion

The contemplative study of Jesus Christ is the Way, Truth and Life toward a renewed experience of fidelity in union with the Church. The Liturgy offers this prayer for the 22nd Sunday of the Year: «... Almighty God ... fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and, by your constant care, perfect the good you have given us...».

Some of the classical sayings might apply here: great men have small beds! - but, the work is never more important than the worker! There is a luxury tax on any intellectual (spiritual) greatness. Sharing the word of God is an obstetric art: it draws out our richest and deepest resources. Vocation means «consecration» - all who sincerely seek the truth in some way are «consecrated». Solitude is its own purity. Plato is also remembered: he claims to have consumed more oil in his midnight lamp than wine in his noon day cup!<sup>59</sup>

The early Franciscans attached great importance to the affective aspects of faith – called «salutary truth» by St. Bonaventure - «truth according to devotion». St. Thomas clearly presented faith as the real beginning of eternal life, an anticipation of the beatific vision. The English word *be-lieve* seems etymologically connected with *love* - just as the Latin verb *credere* is very close to the Latin: *cor dare* - to give one's heart to God<sup>60</sup>.

On a very practical level, the preachers and teachers of the Word of God need to be conversant with a variety of manifestation and explanations of it. If one seeks always and only the authors with whom he might be in full agreement, he may not grow as well as he could if he is also challenged by those who might present a differing point of view within the faith. The yearning to learn is a clear sign of life - development is a central fact of life, and it cannot be lost of the mind and heart of one charged to teach Jesus Christ. Likewise, we should give others the benefit of the doubt, trusting that they are sincerely attempting to arrive at the truth, instead of simply dismissing them with name, such as «liberal» - «reactionary» - «pre- Vatican II» - or, «unorthodox».

Cardinal Ratzinger offers a list of tasks for the students of theology, which, hopefully, all priests are:

- subject the traditions of Christianity to critical examination - to distill the original core;
- respond to people's need for religion and transcendence;

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<sup>59</sup> A. D. SERTILLANGES, OP, *The Intellectual Life. Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*. Cork: Mercier, 2nd ed. 1948, pp. 38, f., 48, f., 56.

<sup>60</sup> A. DULLES, SJ, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, pp. 32, ff., 185.

- promote inter-religious dialogue, and contribute to justice, peace and planetary concerns, and be better spiritual directors;
- each is called to be a comforter of souls.

Let there be in us all a life-long, loving quest to understand, maintaining always within each priestly mind and heart, a coherence of love and truth. Let there be an eras for truth, with agape for all persons. Unity rests in faith, while there will always be pluralism in the realm of theology<sup>61</sup>. Never will there be a full grasp of «the Truth» in this life. Priests should shy away from any self-righteous arrogance that characterizes both extremes in the Church, each comfortably certain that his is the only correct response.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (# 2518) offers this beautiful commentary on the doctrine that is taught and the life that is lived:

The sixth beatitude proclaims: «Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God». «Pure in heart» refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God's holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity, chastity, or sexual rectitude, love of truth and orthodoxy of faith. There is a connection between purity of heart, of body and of faith: The faithful must believe the articles of the Creed, «so that by believing they may obey God, by obeying may live well, by living well, may purify their hearts, and with pure hearts may understand what they believe» (St. Augustine).

The Ritual of the Sacrament of Holy Order presents the wisdom of the ages to the newly ordained. In his «Homily», the ordaining Bishop states: « ... Our brother has seriously considered this step and is now to be ordained to priesthood in the presbyteral order. He is to serve Christ, the Teacher, Priest and Shepherd, in his ministry which is to make his own body, the Church, grows into the people of God, a holy temple... Meditate on the law of Good, believe what you read, teach what you believe and put into practice what you teach. Let the doctrine you teach be true nourishment for the people of God... Know what you are doing and imitate the mystery you celebrate ... Finally, conscious of sharing in the work of Christ, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, and united with the bishop and subject to him, seek to bring the faithful together into a unified family and to lead them effectively, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, to God the Father... ».

JOSEPH C. HENCHEY, CSS

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<sup>61</sup> Cardinal RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, pp. 7, 93.