

# *My Father's House*

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## **The Legacy of Pope John Paul II** *Fr. Bill McCarthy, MSA*

### **Introduction**

No pope in all of history will leave a legacy equal to that of Pope John Paul II. He has spoken eloquently on every facet of faith, spirituality and morals, showing forth a great splendor the length, the height, the depth and the breadth of Catholicism. I would like to set forth some basic themes of his legacy.

### **1. The Papacy**

Pope John Paul II has returned the papacy to its evangelical roots. He has been a one-man renewal, speaking in over 57 languages, in almost every country throughout the world. Over 5 billion people have been touched in some way by him. He has steadied the Church in a time of great turbulence. In his catechesis on the Church, he gave an 11-part catechesis on the Petrine Office stressing that the pope is to be pastor, evangelist and witness.

### **2. The Second Vatican Council**

Pope John Paul has stated that the constant reference point of his every pastoral action - of every one of his encyclicals, letters and apostolic constitutions - was the Second Vatican Council. He stated in his apostolic constitution, which was the preamble of the new Catechism, *Fidei Depositum*, "The principal task entrusted to the Council by Pope John XXIII was to guard and present better the precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will. For this reason the Council was not first of all to condemn the errors of the time, but above all to strive calmly to show the strength and beauty of the doctrine of the faith. "Illumined by the light of this Council", the Pope said, "the Church . . . will become greater in spiritual riches and gaining the strength of new energies therefrom, she will look to the future without fear . . . Our duty is to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us, thus pursuing the path which the Church has followed for 20 centuries. (1)

With the help of God, the Council Fathers in four years of work were able to produce a considerable number of doctrinal statements and pastoral norms which were presented to the whole Church. There the Pastors and Christian faithful find directives for that 'renewal of thought, action, practices and moral virtue, of joy and hope, which was the very purpose of the Council'. (2)

After its conclusion, the Council did not cease to inspire the Church's life. In 1985, I was able to assert, 'For me, then - who had the special grace of participating in it and actively collaborating in its development - Vatican II has always been, and especially during these years of my Pontificate, the constant reference point of my every pastoral action, in the conscious commitment to implement its *directives concretely and faithfully* at the level of each Church and the whole Church.'" (3)

*Therefore, from now on, we will consider the legacy of John Paul II and the Second Vatican Council to be one and the same.*

### 3. The Person

The constant reference point of John Paul II in the Vatican Council is the dignity of the human person. John Paul states that all the rights and privileges of the human being are situated in their personhood. He helped to found an entire school of theology before he was pope known as the Lublin School of Personalism (Poland). He stated that Christ has introduced to the world a new anthropology, namely that man is tripartite body, soul and spirit, capable of transcending the human and living the supernatural life. Man is made by grace, a participator in the divine nature, a child of God, capable of thinking, loving and acting like Christ. When he spoke to the United Nations, he reiterated over and over again the rights, privileges and duties of the human person.

*“Christ,.... in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, makes man fully manifest to himself and brings to light his exalted vocation.”* It is in Christ, *“the image of the invisible God,”* that man has been created *“in the image and likeness”* of the Creator. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.

The divine image is present in every man. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the unity of the divine persons among themselves.

Endowed with a *“spiritual and immortal”* soul, the human person is *“the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.”* From his conception, he is destined for eternal beatitude.

#### **Body, Soul and Spirit, But Truly One**

The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that *“then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”* Man, whole and entire, is therefore *willed* by God.

Sometimes the soul is distinguished from the spirit: St. Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people *“wholly,”* with *“spirit and soul and body”* kept sound and blameless at the Lord’s coming.

### 4. The Truth

In his encyclical on faith and reason, he said, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of trust; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth; in a word, to know Himself; so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves. In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. It is a journey which has unfolded - as it must - within the horizon of personal self-consciousness: The more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing. This is why all that is the object of our knowledge becomes a part of our life.”

*“The Church is no stranger to this journey of discovery, nor could she ever be. From the moment when, through the paschal mystery, she received the gift of the ultimate truth about human life, the Church has made her pilgrim way along the paths of the world to proclaim that Jesus Christ is ‘the way, and the truth, and the life’. (Jn 14:6).”*

### 5. The Good

In his encyclical, *Splendor of the Truth*, the Holy Father stated:

“From the very lips of Jesus, the new Moses, man is once again given the commandments of the Decalogue. Jesus himself definitively confirms them and proposes them to us as the way and condition of salvation (No 12).

From the Church’s beginnings the Apostles, by virtue of their pastoral responsibility to preach the Gospel, were vigilant over the right conduct of Christians, just as they were vigilant for the purity of the faith... The Church is in fact a communion both of faith and of life (No. 26).

Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person’s intelligence... a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly” (No. 32).

## **6. The Family**

Our Holy Father, following the Trinitarian nature of all reality, stresses that because our God is a family and that in the Godhead is the essence of fatherhood, sonship, love and relationship, therefore what God is doing upon earth is creating family His way. Everything acts according to His nature. Therefore, God said, “*Let us (Father, Son and Spirit) create man and woman in our likeness.*” So male and female, He created them.

Because God is one, what He is doing upon earth is creating one family. Because God is holy, what He is doing upon earth is creating one holy family. He gives the Church the Holy Spirit, the sacraments and all the graces necessary to think and love and act like Jesus. And because God is love diffusive of itself, what He is doing upon earth is creating one, holy and apostolic family. And because God loves all people and all nations, what He is doing upon earth is creating one, holy, catholic and apostolic family.

## **7. Divine Filiation**

The Council re-established the Father’s plan to dignify men and women with a participation in His own divine life, that of the Trinity itself (*LG 2*). In order to do this, the Father chose and predestined us to become adopted sons and daughters of God (cf *Eph 1:4,5,10*). Being in Christ Jesus, we automatically are in His Mystical Body and in the Father and, therefore, in the Kingdom of God. Empowered by the Spirit, men and women are able to think, love and act like Jesus, and thus become members of His Mystical Body, which is the Church (*LG 3*).

The Son, therefore, came on mission from His Father. It was in Him, before the foundation of the world, that the Father chose us and predestined us to become adopted sons, for in Him it has pleased the Father to re-establish all things (cf. *Eph 1:4-5 and 10*). To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of the Father. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or, in other words, the Kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly in the world through the power of God.

## **8. Mystical Body**

Beginning with Pope Pius XII’s encyclical on the Mystical Body, and Father Emile Mersch’s magnificent work, *The Mystical Body*, the council re-established a Pauline notion that the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, and as such is not simply a human organization. Therefore, only Christ could have established

a Church, because no man could ever make people members of His own Mystical Body.

“This inauguration and this growth are both symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus (cf. *Jn* 19:34), and are foretold in the Lord’s words concerning His death on the cross: “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself*” (*Jn* 12:32), Greek text). As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which “*Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed*” (*1 Cor* 5:7) is celebrated on an altar, the work of our redemption is carried on. At the same time, in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 10:17) is both expressed and brought about. All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our journey leads us” (*LG* 3).

## **9. The Recovery of the Charismatic Dimension**

Primarily through the leadership of Cardinal Leon Suenens and the establishment of the modern Charismatic Movement, the Council Fathers re-established the charismatic dimension as the constitutive and essential element of its nature. All good gifts come from the Father of mercy through the Son and the working of the Spirit.

When the work which the Father had given the Son to do on earth (cf. *Jn* 17:4) was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might forever sanctify the Church, and thus all believers would have access to the Father through Christ in the one spirit (cf. *Eph* 2:18). He is the Spirit of life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal (cf. *Jn* 4:14; 7:38-39). Through Him the Father gives life to men who are dead from sin, till at last He revives in Christ even their mortal bodies (cf. *Rom* 8:10-11).

The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (cf. *1 Cor* 3:16; 6:19). In them He prays and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons (cf. *Gal* 4:6; *Rom* 8:15-16 and 26). The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13) and gives her a unity of fellowship and service. He furnishes and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorns her with the fruits of His grace (cf. *Eph* 4:11-12; *1 Cor* 12:4; *Gal* 5:22). By the power of the gospel He makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to the Lord Jesus, “*Come!*” (cf. *Apoc.* 22:17). Thus, the Church shines forth as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Pope John Paul would later express on the Feast of Pentecost in 1998: The Holy Spirit, already at work in the creation of the world and in the Old Covenant, reveals Himself in the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery of the Son of God, and in a way “bursts out” at Pentecost to extend the mission of Christ the Lord throughout time and space. The Spirit thus makes the Church a stream of new life that flows through the history of mankind. With the Second Vatican Council, the Comforter recently gave the Church, which according to the Fathers is the place “where the Spirit flourishes” (*CCC* 749), a renewed Pentecost, instilled with a new and unforeseen dynamism.

Whenever the Spirit intervenes, He leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; He radically changes persons and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the people, leads them and

enriches them with His virtues. Allotting His gifts according as He wills (cf *1 Cor* 12:11), He also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank ... He makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church” (*LG* 12).

### **10. The Reformability of the Church**

Because of the presence of the Spirit constantly renewing the Church, the Church is always being reformed into the image and likeness of Christ (*Ecclesia Semper Reformanda Est*). With the Second Vatican Council, especially under the leadership of Pope John Paul II, the Church not only was more open about its faults and failings, but frequently has asked forgiveness from the world for its past sins. The paradox here is that the Church is both human and divine. Insofar as the divine element that is the Holy Spirit takes precedence, the Church is holy. As far as the members of the Church resist the Spirit, it is unholy. “The Church, holding sinners in its embrace, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal” (*LG* 8). Furthermore, in the decree on ecumenism, the Council declared, “Christ summons the Church, as it goes its pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which it always has need, insofar as it is a human institution here on earth” (*UR* 6).

The greatest weakness of the Church of the past and of the present is that it is the Church of sinners. In fact, every Catholic is a sinner, as is everyone else in the world. Thanks to Vatican II we are relieved of the burden of having to defend the whole record of Catholics of the past. We can admit that Catholics have a large share of the responsibility in bringing about the divisions within the Church that have so weakened our Christian witness. The Church, however, does not have an equal affinity to holiness and to evil. Evil is against its true nature. For this reason, Vatican II, while speaking of the Church of sinners, avoided the expression “sinful Church”. It is best to follow the principle of John XXIII, “We do not wish to conduct a trial of the past. Responsibility is divided.”

### **11. Various Models of the Church**

One of the great gifts of the Second Vatican Council was the realization that the Church is like a diamond, a multi-splendored thing. It has to be considered from various images, some drawn from pastoral life, some from agriculture, some from building construction, and some from married life.

Thus, the Church is a sheepfold whose one and necessary door is Christ (*Jn* 10:1-10). She is a flock of which God Himself foretold that He would be the Shepherd (cf *Is* 40:11; *Ez* 34:11 ff). Although guided by human shepherds, her sheep are nevertheless ceaselessly led and nourished by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd and the Prince of Shepherds (cf *Jn* 10:11; *1 Pet* 5:4), who gave his life for the sheep (cf *Jn* 10:11-15).

The Church is a tract of land to be cultivated, the field of God (*1 Cor* 3:9). On that land grows the ancient olive tree whose holy roots were the patriarchs and in which the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile has been brought about and will be brought about (*Rom* 11:13-26). The Church has been cultivated by the heavenly Vinedresser as His choice vineyard (*Mt* 21:33-43 par.; cf *Is* 5:1 ff). The true Vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us. Through the Church, we abide in Christ, without whom we can do nothing (*Jn* 15:1-5).

The Church has more often been called the edifice of God (*1 Cor* 3:9). Even the Lord likened Himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which became the cornerstone (*Mt* 21:42 par; cf *Acts* 4:11; *1 Pet* 2:7; *Ps* 117:22). On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles (cf *1 Cor* 3:11), and from it the

Church receives durability and solidity. This edifice is adorned by various names: the house of God (*1 Tim 3:15*) in which dwells His family; the household of God in the Spirit (*Eph 2:19-22*); the dwelling place of God among men (*Rev 21:3*); and especially, the holy temple. This temple, symbolized by places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the holy Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones, we here on earth are being built up along with this City (*1 Pet 2:5*). John contemplates this Holy City, coming down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, and prepared like a bride adorned for her husband (*Rev 21:1 f*).

The Church, “that Jerusalem which is above,” is also called “*our Mother*” (*Gal 4:26*; cf *Rev 12:17*). She is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb (*Rev 19:7*; *21:2* and *9*; *22:17*). She is whom Christ “loved and delivered Himself up for her that He might sanctify her” (*Eph 5:26*), whom He unites to Himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom He unceasingly “nourishes and cherishes” (*Eph 5:29*). Once she had been purified, He willed her to be joined unto Himself and to be subject to Him in love and fidelity (cf *Eph 5:24*). Finally, He filled her with heavenly gifts for all eternity, in order that we might know the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge (cf *Eph 3:19*). The Church on earth, while journeying in a foreign land and away from her Lord (cf *2 Cor 5:6*) regards herself as in exile.

## **12. The People of God**

Perhaps the greatest breakthrough of the Second Vatican Council was when the Council Fathers rejected the first schema on the Church, which had been prepared by the Roman Curia primarily because of the work of Yves Congar, Cardinal Suard, Father Emile Mersch, and Pope Pius XII. The Spirit was leading the Council Fathers away from an image of the Church that could be imaged as a pyramid with the Pope on top and the laity on the bottom in a passive role. The new image that was emerging was that of a cone; that is the people of God under the inspiration of the Spirit on a journey. In the first schema, Chapter 2 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, would have been *The Hierarchy*. In the new schema Chapter 2 is the *People of God*. This is what the Council Fathers said:

*“At all times and among every people, God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right (cf Acts 10:35). It has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness. He therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto Himself. With it He set up a covenant. Step by step He taught this people by manifesting in its history both Himself and the decree of His will, and by making it holy unto Himself. All these things, however, were done by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ, and of that more luminous revelation which was to be given through God’s very Word made flesh.*

*“Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ... I will give my law in their bowels, and they shall be my people ... For all shall know me, from the least of them even to the greatest, saith the Lord” (Jer 31:31-34).* Christ instituted this new covenant, that is to say, the new testament, in His blood (cf *1 Cor 11:25*), by calling together a people made up of Jew and Gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit.

This was to be the new People of God. For, those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the Word of the living God (cf *1 Pet 1:23*), not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit (cf *Jn 3:5-6*), are finally established as “a chosen race, a royal

priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people ... You who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God “(1 Pet 2:9-10).

### **13. Universal Call to Holiness**

Since the Church is a whole people of God, every single baptized Christian by reason of their baptism is called to holiness. Every baptized Christian by reason of their baptism is called to be priest, prophet and king. Every baptized Christian by reason of their baptism are called to continue across their time and space the redemptive, healing, sanctifying and evangelizing work of Jesus. As the Council Fathers stated: “All the members ought to be molded into Christ’s image until He is formed in them (cf Gal 4:19). For this reason we who have been made like unto Him, who have died with Him and been raised up with Him, are taken up into the mysteries of His life, until we reign together with Him (cf Phil 3:21; 2 Tim 2:11; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12; etc.) Still in our pilgrimage upon the earth, we trace in trial and under oppression the paths He trod. Made one with His sufferings as the body is one with the head, we endure with Him, that with Him we may be glorified (cf Rom 8:17).

From Him, “*the whole body, supplied and built up by joints and ligaments, attains a growth that is of God*” (Col 2:19). He continually distributed in His body, that is, in the Church, gifts of ministries through which, by His own power, we serve each other unto salvation so that, carrying out the truth in love, we may through all things grow up into Him who is our head (cf Eph 4:11-16, Greek text).

### **14. Collegiality**

It is almost a platitude to assert that the Catholic Church from the Middle Ages until Vatican II was pyramidal in structure. Truth and holiness were conceived as emanating from the pope as commander-in-chief at the top, and the bishops were depicted as subordinate officers carrying out the orders of the pope. In our own day, many conservative Catholics lean toward this military analogy of the Church.

Vatican II did not deny the primacy of the pope as it had been defined a century earlier by Vatican I, but it did put the papacy into a significantly new context. The college of bishops, together with the pope as its head, was seen as having the fullness of power in the Church. The individual bishops were portrayed not as mere lieutenants of the pope but as pastors in their own right. They were in fact called “vicars of Christ” (LG 28)—an ancient title that had been given to bishops in the ancient church but that, since about the eighth century, had come to be reserved for the pope.

The principle of collegiality runs through the documents of Vatican II like a golden thread. Just as the pope is surrounded by a college of bishops, so each bishop serves as head of a presbyteral college, called presbytery, and governs his diocese in consultation with presbyters, religious, and laity. Thus the principle of collegiality, understood in a wide sense, may be viewed as pervading all levels of the Church. Pastors, according to the Constitution on the Church, “know that they themselves are not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their services and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart” (LG 30).

Since the council many new institutions have been erected to implement collegiality on various levels; for example, the worldwide synod of bishops, national and regional episcopal conferences, national and diocesan pastoral councils, parish councils, priests’ senates, and the like. If in some cases too many questions have been subjected to prolonged discussion and debate, it has been necessary to go through

this stage to arrive at the proper mean. Parliamentarianism or democracy, if carried too far, is likely to provoke a reaction in the opposite direction, toward a revival of the preconiliar form of authoritarianism, which seemed relatively efficient and rapid. Here the council still calls upon us to devise mechanisms of decision making that respect both the traditional principle of pastoral authority and the nature of the Church as a Spirit-filled community. Neither an army nor a New England town meeting is a suitable paradigm.

### **15. Religious Freedom**

Up to the very time when the council opened, it was far from certain whether the Catholic Church could subscribe to the principle of religious freedom that had by then prevailed in most Protestant bodies and won approval in the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi in 1961. More specifically, it was being asked whether the Church could respect the right and duty of each person to follow his or her conscience with regard to the acceptance or nonacceptance of religious belief. For centuries the Christian churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, had striven to gain control of the apparatus of civil power so as to obtain a privileged status. In the 1950s, when John Courtney Murray began to defend the idea of a religiously neutral state, his orthodoxy was questioned by other American theologians and even by some Roman authorities. Over the protests of his opponents, however, he was invited to Vatican II (not indeed to the first session but from the second session on) and he, as much as any individual, was responsible for the Declaration on Religious Freedom. This Declaration clearly taught that there is no need for the state to profess the true religion or give it a legally privileged status. It approved of civil tolerance for all faiths and rejected, on theological grounds, any coercion in the sphere of belief.

For most Americans the principle of religious freedom offers no difficulties. We almost take it for granted. Our tendency is rather to fall into the opposite extreme, religious indifferentism. We have to remind ourselves that the Declaration itself asserted the unique status of the Catholic faith and the obligation of all believers to profess and defend that faith. Those who sincerely believe and love the truth received from Christ will strive, as did Christ and the apostles, to bear witness to it by their words and deeds and to share their faith with others.

### **16. The Active Role of the Laity**

In the Catholic Church, at least in modern times, priests and religious have borne almost total responsibility for the mission of the Church. The apostolic spirit of the clergy and religious orders has been admirable but, generally speaking, the laity have been rather passive. Seeking to remedy this situation, the movement known as Catholic Action, in the period between the two world wars, sought to involve elite members of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Not satisfied with this, some progressive theologians during the decade before Vatican II held that the laity, besides associating themselves with the apostolate of the hierarchy, should exercise an active apostolate in their own right as baptized believers. The council, endorsing this development, exhorted lay persons to advance the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by discharging their familial and vocational obligations in a manner faithful to Christ.

Since the council, some have maintained that the clergy have as their proper sphere of operation the inner affairs of the Church, whereas lay persons should regard secular matters as their area of competence. The Council, however, does not authorize such a sharp division of labor. The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, exhorts lay persons “to exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders” (AA 50). In other documents the council

provides for active participation of the laity in divine worship, in pastoral councils, and in the sphere of theology. In this last area Vatican II calls upon the laity to speak freely and openly. “In order that such persons may fulfill their proper function,” says the Pastoral Constitution, “let it be recognized that all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matter in which they enjoy competence” (GS 62).

Since the council we have seen in the Church a great increase of lay ministries, not only the canonically erected ministries of reader and acolyte, but also ministries of teaching, music, social action, counseling, and even the distribution of Holy Communion. There has been a great and welcome influx of laymen and laywomen in theology. These new developments, predictably, have raised difficult questions about the specific role of clergy and religious and the responsibilities and powers of the laity. Even if progress in these areas at times has been slow, we may be thankful that much has been accomplished in a relatively short time. In a period of diminishing vocations to the clerical and religious life, it is urgent that lay persons assume greater responsibility than ever for the faith and life of the Church.

### **17. Renewed Attention to the Word of God**

In the Middle Ages, and even more since the Reformation, Catholicism tended to become the Church of law and sacraments rather than the Church of the gospel and the word. Catholics too often neglected the spiritual riches contained in the Bible. Emphasizing the precepts of the Church, they allowed the proclamation of the good news to fall into some neglect. They celebrated the mass in Latin – a language not understood by most of the people – and usually without any homily. In Catholic theology the Bible was viewed as a remote source of doctrine, hardly used except to find proof texts for later church doctrines.

Vatican II, especially in its Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, recovered the primacy of Scripture as the word of God consigned to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (DV 9). The teaching office of the Church, according to the Constitution, “is not above the word of God but serves it, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully ...” (DV 10). “The study of the sacred page,” according to the same Constitution, “is, so to speak, the soul of sacred theology” (DV 24).

The Constitution on Revelation strongly recommended the use of Scripture by all Catholics. “Easy access to sacred Scripture,” it stated, “should be provided for all the Christian faithful” (DV 22). The Scriptures were here compared to the Eucharist, since each in its own way offers to the faithful the bread of life (DV 21). And in the same paragraph we find the following eloquent sentence: “For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power of the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her children, the food of the soul, and a pure and perennial source of spiritual life.”

Besides rehabilitating the Bible, the council sought to renew the ministry of preaching. It called on Catholic preachers to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures to the People of God (DV 23) and warned that, as Augustine had said, “those who do not listen to the word of God inwardly will be empty preachers of the word of God outwardly” (DV 25). Thus priests as well as lay people were exhorted to read the Scriptures prayerfully.

Since the council, such directives have produced excellent fruits. Catholics have learned more about the Bible; many of them attend study and prayer groups that concentrate on the Scriptures. But in this

respect, as in others, further progress remains necessary. There is as yet no danger that Catholics, in their enthusiasm for the word, will forsake ritual and sacrament or that, in their devotion to the gospel, they will neglect the law of Christ and the Church. The more relaxed attitude toward Church law at the present time, while regrettable in some respects, can be viewed as a gain insofar as it helps to overcome an almost pharisaical scrupulosity to which Catholics were subject in the years before Vatican II. Ideally, of course, contrasting elements such as law and gospel, word and sacrament, should not be played off against each other but should rather be mutually reinforcing. The effort to achieve the right balance should be high on the agenda of Catholics today.

### **18. Regional and Local Variety**

From the late Middle Ages until Vatican II the characteristic emphasis of Catholicism had been on the universal church, commonly depicted as an almost monolithic society. Vatican II, by contrast, emphasized the local churches, each of them under direction of a bishop who is called a “vicar of Christ.” Many of the council texts portray the universal church as a communion, or collegial union, of particular churches. “In and from such individual churches,” says the Constitution on the Church, “the one and only Catholic Church takes its rise” (*LG* 23). The local bishop, on the ground of his ordination and appointment, is given authority to be a true pastor of his own community, making responsible decisions rather than simply carrying out Roman directives.

Vatican II made provision also for regional groupings. Speaking of the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity, the council said, “Far from being an obstacle to the Church’s unity, such diversity of customs and observances only adds to its splendor and contributes greatly to carrying out its mission” (*UR* 16). Vatican II accordingly recognized legitimate variety among regional churches, even in the formulation of doctrine. Elsewhere it declared, “The variety of local churches with one common aspiration is particularly splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church” (*LG* 23). “The accommodated preaching of the revealed word,” says the Pastoral Constitution, “ought to remain the law of all evangelization” (*GS* 44). Each nation, we are told, must develop the ability to express Christ’s message in its own way and must foster a living exchange between the Church and the various human cultures (*ibid.*).

The differences between the Catholicism of different regions are much more evident today than twenty years ago, when the customs and liturgy of the Roman church, with its Latin language, were universally enforced. This diversification has not yet run its course. John Paul II, addressing the Zairean hierarchy in May of 1980, spoke in favor of Africanization.

Americanization has been and is taking place in our own Catholicism. Because of our distinctive cultural and political tradition, we must expect certain distinctive ways of thinking and acting in the Church. We have different views than Europeans on how the Church ought to relate to politics and economics. For example, we are more prepared than many other countries to see women rise to positions of leadership in the Church, as they have in political and economic life.

While seeking a sound inculturation, we must avoid thinking that our own national traditions are above criticism or that Americans are a superior people who have nothing to learn from other nationalities. Even where legitimate differences exist, we must take care that they do not disrupt our communion with the rest of the Catholic Church. In this regard we should respect the authority of the Holy See, which has the responsibility before God both to “protect legitimate differences” and to make sure that “such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute to it” (*LG* 13).

## **19. Ecumenism**

Since the Reformation, Catholics have commonly adopted hostile and defensive attitudes toward other Christian churches and especially toward Protestantism. Such hostility has left traces in official documents of the Holy See, notably between Pius IX and Pius XI. In this regard Pope John XXIII and Vatican II effected a quiet revolution. The council in its Decree on Ecumenism expressed reverence for the heritage of other Christian churches, called attention to their salvific importance for their own members, and acknowledged that they possess true elements of the Church of Christ. As a result, anathema has yielded to dialogue. In the ecumenical dialogues since the council, great progress has been achieved in overcoming major differences that have divided the churches for centuries. While formal reunion between the Catholic Church and other communions remains only a distant prospect, Christians of different confessional groups have achieved a far greater measure of mutual understanding, respect, and solidarity.

The proper implementation of ecumenism, as of the other principles we are here considering, requires realism and good judgment. On the one hand, we must overcome our habitual attitudes of suspicion and be open to appreciate all the sound values in other forms of Christianity, both Eastern and Western. On the other hand, we cannot act as though all the ecumenical problems had already been solved. Instead of simply wishing away the remaining disagreements, we must work patiently over a long period to achieve, through prayer and dialogue, a consensus based on truth.

## **20. Dialogue with Other Religions**

Vatican II was not slow in perceiving that the changed attitude of Catholics toward other *Christian* churches called for a corresponding shift in their attitude toward the other religions and their adherents. The council accordingly drew up a Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, which contained a major section on Jewish-Christian relationships. Since the council, important dialogues have taken place between Catholics and Jews, both in this country and abroad.

The principle of interreligious dialogue, like the other principles, challenges us to develop mature and responsible attitudes. Some commentators have introduced an antithesis between mission and dialogue, as if the importance of the one must undercut that of the other. The council, however, kept mission and dialogue in dynamic tension. While recognizing in its Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate*, elements of truth and goodness in all the great religions, and hence the desirability of respectful dialogue (NA 2), the council in its Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*, insisted on the God-given uniqueness of the Church of Christ and consequently on the abiding necessity of missionary labor so that Christ may be acknowledged among all peoples as universal Lord and Savior (AG 6-7).

For Americans, the most obvious application of the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions has to do with Judaism. In parts of the country many, Catholics still hold a latent attitude of hostility, deeply rooted in ethnic and cultural factors. We need to make a special effort to rise above these negative attitudes, which are utterly contrary to the gospel precept of love. As mentioned above, the Church collectively has much to repent of in its historic dealings with the Jewish people. Let us not add to these crimes.

## **21. The Social Mission of the Church**

Since the Reformation, the Catholic Church has tended to regard its mission as an exclusively religious one, aimed at preparing individuals through faith, worship, and right behavior to attain eternal life. Gradually, with the social encyclicals of popes such as Leo XIII and Pius XI, the Church began to assume

responsibility to teach the principles of a just social order, but this order was viewed in terms of conformity to the natural law rather than as an implementation of the gospel.

With John XXIII and Vatican II, the emphasis shifted. The apostolate of peace and social justice came to be seen as a requirement of the Church's mission to carry on the work of Christ, who had compassion on the poor and the oppressed. This changed attitude was eloquently expressed in Vatican II's Message to Humanity, released nine days after the opening of the council in 1962. It was more fully elaborated in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which described the Church as endowed with "a function, a light, and an energy that can serve to structure and consolidate the human community" (GS 42). Since the council this trend has gained momentum. It was reflected in the encyclical of Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), and even more clearly in the synod document, *Justice in the World* (1971), which depicted the struggle for justice and the transformation of society as constitutive dimensions of evangelization. Seeking to carry out the council's mandate to discern the signs of the times in the light of the gospel (GS 4), popes and episcopal conferences have given increasingly concrete directives concerning matters of public policy. The theme of the Church's special solidarity with the poor, already broached at Vatican II (GS 1), has given rise to Latin America to the idea of a "preferential option" for the poor. The theology of poverty and development is further explored by John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

## 22. A New Appreciation of Who Belongs to the Church

All men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God ... And to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation.

**Fully** incorporated into the Church are those who accept all the means of salvation and are in union with the pope and the bishops. **Linked** members are all other Christians who are properly baptized and are in a certain, although imperfect union with the Catholic Church. **Related** members are those who have not yet received the gospel: first of all the Jews who have the prophets, the law and the covenants; then the Muslims who, together with us, adore the one merciful God; then members of other non-Christian religions; and then all people of goodwill.

## 23. A New Heavens and a New Earth

The Church, which is called "that Jerusalem which is above" and "our mother", is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless lamb. It is she whom Christ "loved and for whom He delivered Himself up that He might sanctify her." It is she whom He unites to himself by an unbreakable alliance, and whom He constantly "nourishes and cherishes." (CCC 757)

The Church, to which we are all called In Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven. Then will come the time of restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). Then the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and achieves its purpose through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ (cf Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; 2 Pet 3:10-13).

At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign forever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed: The Church... will receive her perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things. At that time, together with the human race, the universe itself, which is

so closely related to man and which attains its destiny through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ.

Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, “new heavens and a new earth.” It will be the definitive realization of God’s plan to bring under a single head “all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.

#### **24. Family the Way of the Church**

From September 5, 1979 to November 28, 1984, he gave an extended catechesis on marriage, the family, celibacy, the theology of the body and human love in the divine plan. He also wrote an apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981) on marriage and the family and wrote a Letter to Families on February 2, 1994.

#### **25. God the Father**

Pope John Paul wrote an encyclical on God the Father, *Dives in Misericordia*, (Nov. 30, 1980). From January 16, 1985 to June 25, 1986, he gave an extended catechesis on God the Father including four on the fullness of the Father’s revelation, 13 on revelation and faith, 12 on the existence and nature of God, 11 on the Trinity, nine on God as Creator, and nine on the Father’s divine providence. And then during the Year of the Father, 1999, he gave another 28 teachings in his catechesis on God the Father. The greatest official doctor of God the Father that the Catholic Church has thus far produced is John Paul II.

#### **26. The Angels**

He followed this catechesis with a short catechesis on angels from July 9, 1986 to August 20, 1986.

#### **27. God the Son**

John Paul’s first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, (Redeemer of Man, 1979) was on God the Son. From August 27, 1986 to April 19, 1989, he gave an extended catechesis on sin and our Redeemer, Christ. He added another 28 discourses during the Year of Christ, 1997, in preparation for the Jubilee Year. In every encyclical, allocution, letter, and homily, he centers us on Christ. The greatest *Christological* doctor that the Catholic Church has thus far produced, is, of course, John Paul II.

#### **28. God the Holy Spirit**

John Paul II wrote an entire encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *The Lord and Giver of Life* issued on Pentecost, May 18, 1986 - the Pope’s birthday - followed shortly by seven reflections on the gifts of the Spirit in 1989. He also presented an extended 80-part catechesis on the Holy Spirit from April 26, 1989 to July 3, 1991. He provided continuous teachings during the Year of the Spirit, 1998, in preparation for the new millennium; and presented additional Pentecost discourses on the Holy Spirit that culminated on Pentecost, 1998, with a magnificent talk to a half million charismatics in St. Peter’s Square in which he stated:

“Whenever the Spirit intervenes, He leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; He radically changes persons and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements: “it is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the people, leads them and enriches them with His virtues. Allotting His gifts as He wills (cf. *I Cor* 12:11), He also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank ... He makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church”

(*Lumen Gentium*, n 12).

All of these discourses on the Holy Spirit I have included in my book, *The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Pope John Paul II*. He is the most Charismatic of popes, and, thus far, the greatest official doctor of *Pneumatology*.

### **29. The Church**

The Holy Father also gave an extended catechesis on the Church. It contains the series of his catecheses on the article: *"I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."* The series contains 137 catecheses given between July 10, 1991, and August 30, 1995. Included in these talks were 37 homilies on the nature and mystery of the Church in the plan of God, including one on April 8, 1992 on the Eucharist as the source of the Church's life. He gave eight talks on the theology of bishops, eleven on the theology of the papacy, 18 on the theology of priests, three on the theology of deacons, 27 on the theology of the lay apostolate, 19 on the theology of consecrated life, 16 on the missionary activity of the Church and ecumenism. He is the greatest modern doctor on *Ecclesiology*.

### **30. The Trinity**

During the Jubilee Year 2000, he presented an entire series of talks on the Trinity. This occurred after completing three years of preparation by giving an entire series of talks in 1997 on the Son, in 1998 on the Spirit and in 1999 on the Father. He sees the Trinity as the familiar model for the Church. Since God is above all family, what God is above all doing on earth is creating family His way. Since God is holy and one, he is creating one, holy family. And since God loves everyone, he is creating one, holy, catholic, apostolic family for all nations. He stresses that all life, all holiness comes from the Father through the Son by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Our Holy Father states that the God we worship is a trinity of persons, loving one another, deferring to one another, delighting in one another. During the Jubilee Year 2000, he gave a whole catechesis on the whole triune nature of God, reminding us that from the Father emanates all truth in his Son and all love in His Spirit. God the Father has a plan for our lives. By an utterly free and mysterious decree of His own wisdom and goodness, the eternal Father created the whole world. His plan was to dignify men with a participation in His own divine life. He did not abandon men after they had fallen in Adam, but ceaselessly offered them helps to salvation, in anticipation of Christ the Redeemer, *'who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature'* (Col 1:15). All the elect, before time began, the Father *'foreknew and predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, that He should be the firstborn among many brethren'* (Rom 8:29).

"He planned to assemble in the holy church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. She was prepared for in a remarkable way through the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant. Established in the present era of time, the Church was made manifest by the outpouring of the Spirit. At the end of time she will achieve her glorious fulfillment. Then, as may be read in the holy Fathers, all just men from the time of Adam, 'from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,' will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church' (LG 2)."

### **31. The Eucharist**

He followed these talks with nine talks on the Eucharist that are reprinted in their entirety in this book, stressing the centrality of the Eucharist in salvation history and God's work in transforming us into other

Christ's so that we with unveiled faces can reflect like mirrors the brightness of the Son of God who is our glory. The more we receive Him, the more we will become like Him. The more we worship Him, the more He fills us with His Spirit. He stresses that the greatest way to worship the Father in spirit and in truth is in and through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

### **32. Prayers of the Liturgy**

He is now giving an extensive catechesis on the prayers, psalms and canticles of the Liturgy of the Office stressing the importance of prayer in his life and in our lives and in the life of the Church.

### **33. To Priests**

In addition to his 18 talks in his catechesis to priests contained within the catechesis on the Church, he writes a special letter to his priests on Holy Thursday and has issued an apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (I Will Give You Shepherds) on March 25, 1992.

### **34. Encyclicals**

This encyclical on the Eucharist is his 14th. He wrote one on the *Father* (1980); one on the *Son* (1979); one on the *Spirit* (1986); three on social issues--on *Work* (1981), on *Solicitude for Social Concerns* in 1987 and one on the *100th Anniversary* of the first social encyclical of Leo XIII in 1991; one on *Mary* (1987); two on moral issues—the *Gospel of Life* (1995) and the *Splendor of the Truth* (1993), one on the *Mission of the Redeemer* (1990), one on *Ecumenism* (1995), one on *Faith and Reason* (1998), and one on *The Apostles of the Slavic People* in 1985.

### **35. To Set Out Into the Deep**

Now the Holy Father is issuing a new call to set out into the deep, which is his rallying cry taken from the words of Jesus to His own apostles: to “cast out into the deep” (*Duc in Altum*). Father Frank Anderson from Australia has written a song that captures the feeling of this great pope:

*“So I leave my boats behind, leave them on familiar shores, set my heart upon the deep, follow you again, my Lord.”* This is the battle cry for the new millennium – to be more deeply involved with the Father’s plan, to be more deeply immersed in Eucharistic awareness, to be more deeply committed to the missionary activity of the Church, to be more deeply imbued with the Spirit of Christ.

Towards that end, the Holy Father has given his seven powerful but practical priorities centering them all upon the Eucharist. He is asking for Eucharistic adoration in every church throughout the world for he has comprehended a tremendous spiritual principle, namely that the more you sow unto the heavens, the more God will sow unto the earth. That is, the more you worship and praise God, the more you will come into His glory, His divine presence. The more you enter His presence, the stronger will be the anointing of the Spirit upon you. And the stronger the anointing, the more wisdom, love and power you will have to transform the world in the image and likeness of Christ, until that eschatological day when every knee will bend before Jesus and proclaim to the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord.

### **36. The Holy Father’s Pastoral Plan**

Pope John Paul II, on the very day that he closed the Holy Year Door, January 6, 2001, issued a brand new document entitled *Tertio Millennio Ineunte* -- “As We Enter the Third Millennium”. In this magnificent apostolic letter, the Holy Father gave his pastoral plan for the whole Church in the new millennium and emphasized seven pastoral priorities for each and every Catholic. It was the first time in recorded history that any Holy Father has done such. He calls it his program.

## **Not a New Program**

He states: “It is not, therefore, a matter of inventing a ‘new program’. The program already exists. It is a plan found in the gospel and, in the living tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ Himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated so that in Him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with Him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a program which does not change with shifts of time and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This program for all times is our program for the third Millennium. But it must be translated *into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.*”

His seven pastoral priorities are:

1. Holiness
2. Prayer as a reciprocal conversation with God
3. The centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic belief and practice
4. Frequent confession
5. To live by grace and by the Spirit
6. Frequent meditation on the Scriptures and the New Catechism
7. The new evangelization

## **The Eighth**

Then on the 16th of October, 2002, he issued another apostolic letter on the rosary. In this, he added an eighth pastoral priority, namely the frequent recitation of the rosary.

## **Eucharist Is Central**

Subsequently, on Holy Thursday, April 7, 2003, he issued his 14th encyclical on the Eucharist summing up everything he encouraged in the Eucharist. In fact, he poignantly begins the very first sentence of *Ecclesia De Eucharista* (The Church from the Eucharist) with the words, “*The Church draws her very life from the Eucharist.*” He went on to say, “The Eucharist recapitulates the heart of the Church and is the deepest fulfillment of Our Lord’s promise, ‘*Behold, I am with you always.*’” He further states, “*The Holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth. It is the summit of Catholic devotion.*”

## **The Incarnate Presence of Christ in the Church**

He encourages all of us to gaze constantly toward the Lord present in the sacrament of the altar to discover the full manifestation of his boundless wisdom, love and power. He sums up the essence of his new vision in Section 6 where he states,

“I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic “amazement” by the present Encyclical Letter, in continuity with the Jubilee heritage which I have left to the Church in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and its Marian crowning, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the “program” which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize Him where He manifests Himself, in His many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of His body and His blood. The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by Him she is fed and by Him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a “mystery of light”. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “*Their eyes were*

*opened and they recognized him” (Lk 24:31).*

### **To See Thee More Clearly**

The Holy Father has stated that he wants to open up the eyes of all to the amazement of those things that eyes have not seen nor ears have heard nor has it entered into the minds of men the glories and happiness that God has revealed in the Eucharist and in the Church. And that which we behold with our eyes, we will learn to love.

### **To Love Thee More Dearly**

The Holy Father is asking the whole Church to renew the liturgy of the Mass to make it more present, operative, personal, and powerful in the lives of the faithful so that they will be filled with the very love of Christ for the Father and for each other. He reminds us that the Eucharistic Christ is a man for others. Therefore, we who receive Him become men and women for others...for God, the Church and especially the poor.

### **To Follow Thee More Nearly**

Thus filled with the Eucharistic presence of God’s wisdom, love and power, we become lights to a dark and broken world. We become another Jesus capable of continuing the redemptive, healing, evangelizing work of Jesus. We become His hands, His eyes, His lips, His feet, His very body. We become apostles of truth, of love and of action. Accordingly, we become participants in the Pope’s new evangelization to bring Christ to every person and every strata of human endeavor...into our courts, our offices, our working environments, our art, our sport, our homes, and our world. We become proclaimers in word and in deed that Christ is risen, lives and reigns through us.

## **37. Mary - The Mother**

Pope John Paul II is the greatest modern Marian pope. His entire pontificate is devoted to Mary and his coat of arms is *Totus Tuus* (Totally Yours). He wrote an encyclical on March 25, 1987, the Feast of the Annunciation, entitled *Mother of the Redeemer (Redemptoris Mater)*. He then gave a 70-part catechesis on Mary from September 6, 1995 to November 12, 1997 emphasizing that Mary, in addition to being our mother, mediatrix, and messenger, is also a perfect realization of the Church’s holiness and its model. He stressed her unique role in salvation history as mother of us all. He ends every apostolic letter, homily, constitution or encyclical by reflecting on Mary. All of these I have included in my book, *Mary in the Church Today*. So it is only fitting that we end his legacy, stressing the dignity of all women and the dignity of that woman who is Virgin, Bride and Mother.

## **38. Mary - A Sure Sign of Hope for All Women**

In his Apostolic Letter on the Dignity of Women, the Holy Father stated:

“The dignity and the vocation of women - a subject of constant human and Christian reflection - have gained exceptional prominence in recent years. This can be seen, for example, *in the statements of the Church's Magisterium* present in various documents *of the Second Vatican Council*, which declares in its Closing Message: ‘The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment, when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling’.<sup>1</sup> *This Message* sums up what had already been expressed in the Council's teaching, specifically in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 2 and in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3.

Similar thinking had already been put forth in the period before the Council, as can be seen in a number of Pope Pius XII's Discourses<sup>4</sup> and in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII.<sup>5</sup> After the Second Vatican Council, my predecessor *Paul VI* showed the relevance of this "sign of the times", when he conferred the title "Doctor of the Church" upon Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint Catherine of Siena,<sup>6</sup> and likewise when, at the request of the 1971 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, he set up a *special Commission* for the study of contemporary problems concerning the "*effective promotion of the dignity and the responsibility of women*".<sup>7</sup> In one of his Discourses Paul VI said: "Within Christianity, more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects...; it is evident that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear".<sup>8</sup>

The Fathers of the recent Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 1987), which was devoted to "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council", once more dealt with the dignity and vocation of women. One of their recommendations was for a further study of the anthropological and theological bases that are needed in order to solve the problems connected with the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man. It is a question of understanding the reason for and the consequences of the Creator's decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man. It is only by beginning from these bases, which make it possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and vocation of women, that one is able to speak of their active presence in the Church and in society.

This is what I intend to deal with in this document. The Post-Synodal Exhortation, which will be published later, will present proposals of a pastoral nature on the place of women in the Church and in society. On this subject the Fathers offered some important reflections, after they had taken into consideration the testimonies of the lay Auditors - both women and men - from the particular Churches throughout the world."

### **Mary - The Icon of Heaven**

The Holy Father reminds us that Mary is the icon not only of all women but also of all men. What God did in her in the final analysis, He will do in each one of us. Just as Mary was the mother of Jesus, so we are to bear Christ in our spirit. As Mary was full of grace, so shall each of us be after purgatory. And as Mary was assumed into heaven, so shall we be. In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise, Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (cf 2 *Pet* 3:10), as a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God.