

SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF SAINT JOHN OF JERUSALEM
OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

Journals of Spirituality

**A consideration on
“Novo Millennio Ineunte”
for the Order of Malta**

A Reflection on key phrases
of the Pontifical Document



ROME 2002

N. 1

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INTRODUCTION

As an introduction to the pages that form this first “Journal of Spirituality”, addressed to the Knights and Dames of our Sovereign Order, I would like to exhort all to read attentively and use as a text for meditation this examination of the Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio Inenunte” which Pope John Paul II has written at the completion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, not solely for bishops and priests, but also for the faithful.☒

Above all, it is necessary that each one should obtain a copy of the text, consisting of only eight pages, and in modern languages.

We need to read this work, not in a distracted or hurried manner, but pausing at each page, examining carefully the sense of the words of the Holy Father, his references, his propositions, his considerations. There are four brief chapters, the first, preceded by a short introduction, is entitled: “Meeting Christ, the legacy of the Great jubilee”; the second has the title: “A face to contemplate”; the third: “The starting afresh from Christ”; and the fourth; “Witness to love”, and from there follows a brief conclusion.

Three Latin words open and close the Letter, and constitute the “Leitmotif” of the document: “Duc in Altum”. They are the words given by the divine Master, who chose the boat of Simon Peter as “the pulpit” to speak to the crowd gathered alongside the bank of the Lake of Gedesareth. After speaking, Jesus turned to Peter saying: “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught”.

It is time now for members of the Order of Malta, acting on five continents, “to launch out into the deep”. To row with more vigour, assisted by the favourable wind of almost a thousand of years of experience. “Duc in Altum! These words ring out for us today” the Holy Father writes, “and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm, and to look forward to the future with confidence”. (nr1)

The past, for us members of the Order of Malta, over 900 years, should be remembered with an old honourable and real gratitude; the present filled with a passionate commitment to defend the fait and to assist Our Lords the sick. And, we should look forward to the future with limitless confidence, placed in Him “who is the same yesterday, today and always”.

The careful reader of the words of John Paul II cannot move far from particular phrases of the text, that contain in themselves a whole plan of life. I would like to cite for you two thoughts, one is found at the beginning of the third chapter, where the Pope offers an urgent invitation for "Starting afresh from Christ". In n.29 he writes, "We are certainly not seduced by the naïve expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person and the assurance he gives us "I am with you!" It is therefore in the Person of Jesus Christ that we can use to take and build each a trust that we shall succeed. Christ "gives to know, to love, to imitate".

And, the other phrase is found in n. 49 of the fourth chapter, where the Pope exhorts us to "stake everything on charity". I think there is no invitation that matches the charisma of our Order as much as this one. The Holy Father, referring to the text of the Gospel of St. Mark, chapter 25, where Jesus identifies himself with those who are in need of assistance and relief affirms: "This Gospel text is not just an initiation to charity: it is a text of Christology that sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ". He adds: "By these words, no less than by the

orthodoxy of the doctrine, the Church measures the fidelity as the Bride of Christ". I think that it is not possible to find a more complete and incisive formula nor one that contains a plan that explains the aims of the Order of Malta, "Defensio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum", urging first the defence of the truth of Faith and Morals, that constitute our Creed and the laws governing our conduct. And the other activity favours those who suffer hunger, who hunger, or are deprived of liberty, are victims of abuse of power, in a word, Our Lords the sick. These are the two different aspects of the Order, one of orthodoxy and the other of charity. Upon these are measured our fidelity to Christ and the Church, and our coherence to the charisma of the Order. Cardinal Pio Laghi Representant du Souverain Pontife pres l'Orde « Cardinalis Patronus » Bailli Grand-Croix d'Honneur et de Dévotion avec Croix de Profession « ad honorem »

*Cardinal Pio Laghi
Representant du Souverain Pontife
pres l'Orde « Cardinalis Patronus »
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avec Croix de Profession « ad honorem »*

A FACE TO CONTEMPLATE

The Order of Malta was born in Jerusalem, under the protection of St. John the Baptist, around the Hospital to assist and heal Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. Today, as then, one goes to the Holy Land to see close up the place where Jesus spent His life and to relive on the spot the Gospel story. Returning to his country the pilgrim reads the Gospel with the memory of such an experience and, meditating, looks again for a Person, a Face, which is lit with the Faith, “Vultum tuum Domine requiram”.

Mother Teresa used to say that her sisters in the morning find Jesus in the Eucharist and later in the day in the person of the poor. Similarly, Blessed Gerard and his companions in Jerusalem put themselves in the footsteps of Jesus and searched for Him in the service of the sick.

The Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” writes that it is the task of the Church “to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium. An arduous and exacting task. According to the Pope the essential

requisite to fulfil this is to be “a contemplative of the face of Christ” as He emerges in the testimonies of the Gospels.

The members of the Order of Malta, stronger than other Christians, should hold to the commitment to adhere to the Gospels searching the face of Christ that emerges from it. To search and to stay close. Charles de Foucault, after his conversion, went to live for a time in Nazareth in poverty, dependent on a monastery to experience in faith the hidden life of Jesus. Strengthened from this experience he retired to the Algerian Sahara among the Tuareg.

Hence, we search with perseverance in the Gospels for the face of Christ, Medeleine Delbrêl used to urge her spiritual daughters and her friends to “Read the Gospel – held in the hands of the Church – as one eats bread.” But let us pay attention: St. Augustine says that the master that speaks from outside will serve us poorly if he does not speak from the inside. Romano Guardini cites these assertion of St. Augustine and writes, “The written word and the oral message will be understood solely when Christ whom we seek confirms us interiorly as He did when He was with his disciples at Emmaus opening their

eyes and inflaming their hearts”. We should also search with spiritual intensity, to desire, to knock, and to pray. (R. Guardini, *The Figure of Jesus in the New Testament*, Morcelliana 2000).

The virtual pilgrimage that we read of in the Gospel is like the real one in Palestine with its end on the Via Dolorosa, on Calvary, near the Sepulchre, where we encounter what the Pope calls the “suffering face of Christ”. It was an aspiration of *Giovanniti* at Jerusalem and the pilgrims whom they assisted to be near the place of the passion and death of the Lord.

Even St Francis of Assisi wished to go to the Holy Land. All his life he sought the Lord in the Gospel which he read and applied to his life “without gloss,” and fully. For St Francis the highest experience was his encounter at La Verna with the suffering face of the Lord from whom he received the Stigmata.

And finally, the face of the Risen Christ looked upon his Apostles as He sent them to teach all nations promising: “Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.” (MT 28:20) Even so for us who live at the beginning of this millennium and are invited to offer the Splendour of His face to a new generation. This obligation is part of

the “defensio fidei,” which is the motto of our Order. The octagonal Cross which distinguishes us would be only a pretty bauble if it did not underline our interior membership and if it is not handed down the generations in the testimony that the Holy Father indicates. A testimony that, as a Precursor, John the Baptist had given inviting us to look at and to follow Jesus: “Behold the Lamb of God.” His testimony was an endorsement of an austere life and a repudiation of self, “I am not the Chirst... He must increase an I must decrease”. (JN 3: 28,30) “In the midst of you there is one whom you do not recognize ... whose sandals I am not worthy to loose”. (LK 3: 16)

The quality of the testimony requires above all a repudiation of the evil that is in us, a *brake* on the affirmation of self, a certain austerity of life and an obligation to announce our faith in Jesus and to exercise charity.

If we call the persons we assist Our Lords the Sick, let us do it with the focus of the Gospel: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was sick and you came to visit me... As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren you did it for me”. (MY 25:35) In helping the poor and the sick we see

in transparency the face of Christ Jesus.

The Order of Malta is brought forward to the third millennium strengthened by a tradition of 900 years. The exhortation contained in the Apostolic Letter finds with harmony this ancient tradition. It will continue and be strengthened if its members take up the invitation of the Holy Father and give a generous response.

Monsignor Angelo Acerbi

STARTING AFRESH FROM CHRIST

The Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” seems to present a triptych dominated by the figure of Christ. In the first panel is the face of Jesus to be sought and contemplated. It is an initial theme of the highest inspiration that develops in the second panel where it proposes again that by the beginning of the third millennium the “Duc in altum” becomes a new leap in our Christina an apostolic life. In the third panel, this “high measure” of Christian life is seen in action within the community and in the exercise of many charities.

This small essay which does pretend to be a commentary on the Pontifical document, has the intention of pointing out its content to the members of the Order of Malta, reminding them: it concerns us, it is for us.

It would be interesting to study our Order across the 900 years or its existence, seeking what it has done to fulfil in us its inspiring motives in a profound continuity; and to see how the Order responded to the challenges that it confronted over such a changing period. Once again it is most important to assume

clearly our responsibilities to the present, “*Jesus heri, hodie et in saecula*”. Christ Jesus is with us today as yesterday, and with Him we wish to encounter the challenges of modern society. The presence of Christ yesterday and today is an unfailing richness in our lives and through our action in the world.

The Holy Father proposes to all a “high measure” in ordinary Christian life. The words “high measure” reflect well the invitation of Jesus to the Apostles “*Duc in Altum!*” To the deep, but towards where? The goal to which the Pope points is certainly daring: it is nothing less than sanctity. But this is not a new thing. The path is shown to each Christian in his baptism, which contains the call to holiness.

In the Chapel of the Via Condotti Palace, there is a gallery of Saints of the Order of Malta that, as a noble decoration runs across the high wall. How beautiful a thought it would be that, little by little, this gallery extend itself a long way in the corridors of our headquarters. It would be a proof that the Christian life is practised in “high measure” in our Order. The Holy Father, however, cautions us not to misunderstand this ideal of perfection thinking that it implies a sort of extraordinary life practised by only

a few “uncommon heroes” of sanctity.

In the society of 1600, some social classes being flighty, others rigorous under the influences of Jansenism, St. Francis de Sales with a firm sweetness proposed the ideal of the “devout life” to people of the court, to the nobles and military, as well as to the meek and to the nuns of the Visitation. “The Devout Life” is none other than the “high measure” of the Christian life of which the Pope speaks.

In the first half of January a congress was held in Rome for the centenary of the birth to Blessed Jesemaria Escrivà de Balaguer, founder of “Opus Dei”. Indeed the idea of the fonder is sanctification through works or a profession. “The ways for holiness, writes the Pope, are many, according to the vocation of each individual”

Our Order has wisely encouraged us in the variety of our callings. It encourages a consecrated life to the professed, enriched by the fascination of being nearer the evangelical counsels; and to the members in obedience and to all, assistance to respond generously to our baptismal vocation. Membership in the Order should signify a choice that may not satisfy itself in “a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a

shallow religiosity”. (Apostolic letter cited).

The Holy Father also develops aspects of a “pedagogy of sanctity”. I would like to mention his specific points touching prayer, listening, and announcing the word. He sees as a sign of the times, the widespread demand for spirituality despite a widespread secularisation. This demand for spirituality can be felt in our Order, as an antidote to the anomalous and incongruous mentality of those who judge that a spiritual preparation is not necessary to enter the Order and that membership in the Order is only an honorific distinction. On the contrary, it is necessary seriously to follow the stage or preparation which precede entrance into the Order, and to take part in the spiritual training that each Priory, Association and Delegation must organize as a priority.

Here we must reflect on prayer itself. The demand for spirituality naturally leads to a period of prayer. At the origins of our religious and Hospitallers Order there was a natural link between a Christian life in community and service in a hospital. We can imagine how the life of the members of the Order from the beginning was shared between work and prayer. The Holy Father has spoken of a new vision of char-

ity and the Grand Prior of Rome has given us in this essay a contribution inserted by this theme. But it is also possible to consider new initiatives seeing our Order an “authentic” school of prayer not limited to the Professed who have received a vacation and the gift of consecration. Indeed, all in the Order should listen interiorly “in the school of Christ,” according to the beautiful Benedictine expression. “in prayer”, the Pope tells us “one develops such a dialogue with Christ that it renders us intimate with the Lord: “Remain in me and I in You.”(JN 15:4). Prayer does not distract from our commitment to charity; it opens our hearts to the love of God. It opens them to the love of our neighbour. Without Christ we cannot do anything: “sine me nihil” (JN 15: 5). The call “Duc in altum!” was directed to the apostles who worked all night in the Sea of Galilee without catching anything. How beautiful are the prayers that rise from the Hospital and those done together with the poor who receive our aid; and the insistent supplications of Our Lords the sick on Pilgrimages!

Starting afresh from Christ means we place the Eucharist at the centre of our spiritual life and apostolic actions. One Sunday without the Eucharist con-

stitutes for a member of the Order not only a grave emptiness in the personal life but is also a serious dissonance within the Order itself.

Finally, listen and announce the word, Hearing from the Words signifies that we know the Words of God, and frequently read Sacred Scripture. It would not be normal if the house of a member of the Order lacked a Bible. Our motto “Tuitio fidei” demands, especially today, proclamation of the Words. The Holy Father exhorts us to courage and to an obligation to the “new evangelisation” in a context of “globalisation and of the new and intertwining mix of people and culture.”

A weekly review in the magazine of an important Italian newspaper recently published an interview done by two well known journalists regarding aspects of the new Europe. Regarding Islam in Europe, the following question was raised: “Shall we abolish the chador in classrooms and also remove the crucifix there?” One of two journalists replied, “Chador and crucifix have very different significances.” The other responded, “And to remove the crucifix, today, would be a mistake. At this delicate moment of relations with Islam, it would be only a demagogic and offen-

sive gesture. It would be exactly like placing it on the same level as the chador, like admitting that a crucifix is there to demonstrate something. It is not like that. It is there because it always was, through tradition. Well now, if we think it over, it is a bit like Father Christmas”. No, it is not like that, We do not accept such an affirmation. For us members of the Order of Malta, and for many others, the “dolorous Face” of the Crucifix is a sign of love without limits and a fountain of grace.

Leafing through The Annual Yearbook of the Order of Malta one has the perception of how wide is its diffusion. At the beginning of the third millennium all of its members are invited to start afresh with Christ and to place themselves on the diverse roads of the world for the defence of the faith and the exercise of charity.

Together with the Holy Father we believe that “the Blessed Virgin accompanies us on the path”. We invoke her under the title of the Madonna of mount Philermo who has been protecting our Order for centuries.

Monsignor Angelo Acerbi

TESTIMONY OF LOVE

At the beginning of the reflections below we should be aware what “love” signifies in the Christian biblical ideology, because the word love that is used in novels and in the mass media, television and journals, newspapers, magazines, etc., is rooted in almost pure egoism.

We wish to glance at the Bible.

Mark 12: 29-31

And one of the Scribes asked Jesus which is the first of all commandments and Jesus answered him, “The first is, *Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one God; and thou shall love the Lord with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength.* The second is like to it; *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* There is no greater commandment than these.”

All this that we do and all the components of our lives should be subordinated to those commandments. Only this can bring one to perfect charity which, with the assistance of the faith, can move mountains. (1COR 13:2)

But Christ has given to us a new commandment, “That you love one another: By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”(IN13: 34-35)

Such a new commandment of love of our neighbour accords with the example of Jesus’ Love, up to His death and surpasses the commandment contained in the Old Testament. (LEV 19:18)

The Apostle to the Gentiles wrote, You are “the chosen ones of God, holy and beloved.”(COL 3:12)

Then we may ask ourselves: How can I demonstrate my love to the omnipotent God? Even in this case I cannot avoid reference to Sacred Scripture, “If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love as I also have kept my Father’s commandment, and abide in his love”. (JN15:10) But what happens when we commit sin, which unfortunately is foreseeable from the beginning? Indeed, Scripture says, “For in many things we all offend, “(James3:2) we are even in need of the mercy of God to be able to pray daily: Absolve our sins.

In the preface of the Nativity we pray in these words: “In the visible person of the Saviour you show us the invisible God, to inflame us with love

which no eye has ever seen. Like Christ, who through His love for us men and to reconcile us to His Father in heaven, freely chose death on the cross to offer a greater and higher sacrifice. As also for us men, the highest expression of our love toward God is to sacrifice our own lives for Him.

Without pretending to exhaust the subject, permit me to present as examples fine behaviour on our journey in life:

- The development and achievement of personal depth in meditating on the mystery of faith;
- Observance of the commandments of God and the Church;
- Association with the sacrifice of Christ through the Sacrament of the Eucharist;
- Reconciliation in Confession;
- Examination and verification of our particular vocation in life to the priesthood or to another form of consecrated life;
- Prayer and sacrifice to foster vocations to the priesthood and other consecrated life;
- Promotion of a proclamation of the Faith in our particular family;
- Education to a style of life, frugal and temperate,

conscious of our proper duties and responsibility, even and especially in the development of proper professional activity as employee or manager;

- Dedication with exceptional generosity to a neighbour in need, whether it is a person with a physical disability or psychological sickness, or through an accident or just aged; whether this “neighbour” caused his own incapacity and cannot conform to the demands of modern life;
- Whether finally, our neighbour finds himself in physical, psychological or economical disadvantage because of race, religion, domestic or armed conflict, natural catastrophe or any other emergency or even through a crisis of interpersonal relationship.

This reminds us that we can find our neighbour who is in need or our assistance, in every corner of life, just as Christ described it in his parable of the Good Samaritan. Just as there are diverse causes of need, so are the opportunities or offering to show our love of neighbour. In recounting the lives of numerous saints and blessed of our Catholic Church we discover varied testimony of immense love as such saints or blessed were successful in showing love under the inspiration of the Faith. From so many

examples I would like to underscore three that represent true models of perfect love lived in the likeness of God and of human beings.

In this context I think of blessed Wilmos Apor, a conventual's chaplain of our Order who had given shelter in his Episcopal palace to more than 200 persons, the majority being women and children. He protected them at the approach of the Soviet soldiers who killed, plundered, and caused personnel violence. Apor encountered the soldiers in all his Episcopal vestments to defend and offer refuge to the helpless. One soldier mortally struck him with his pistol, but in this the Bishop saved the life of other persons, because after the murder the soldiers left his palace in haste.

I think of Thérèse of Lisieux, who up to the day of her premature death succeeded in developing a unique religious devotion, accompanied by an intellectual simplicity, as an inner attitude of her soul, in a love at once filial and mystical, for Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, I think that our blessed founder, Fra' Gerard had initially dedicated his life to the cure and helping of the sick *Amalfitani* Merchants, but later broadening his activity, at the time of the First Crusade which was beginning to besiege Jerusalem. He reached

our to all the sick, wounded and exhausted, without any distinction of race or religion. In each one of these persons he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, and helped them in all possible ways, in the mission of charity contained in the Beatitudes, and transmitting human warmth and bringing great comfort.

Fra' Ludwig Hoffman-Rumerstein

STAKE EVERYTHING ON CHARITY

Consider, what we ask each day, “Lord, what do you wish me to do? What do you expect of me? What is your will?”.

And promptly, the response arrives upsetting and at the same time exulting, “Son, my son, live fully the civility of love, hour by hour walk on the path of charity...”.

It is true that there exists a sharp distinction between those who observe suffering and those who with all their hearts wish to and do share in it.

Dostoyevski says through one of his personages that beauty will save the world.

No, supreme Artist, beauty will not save the world. The world will be saved by love, intense like a radiant and intimate charity, in a global availability to love, to help, to set forth to serve of many who are bruised by suffering and show the signs of pain. If we succeed immediately in seeing in each suffering person, an image of the sweetness of Christ, we will be saved! We shall save ourselves and them...

His Holiness John Paul II, our beloved Pope, has recently reminded us, that giving life to charity, is

a highly good thing and a useful one in exercising creativity.

Hence, says the Holy Father, create space for charity because so much suffering is around us, It is a hard demand, opaque, rigid, with very little escape, But *caritas urget nos...! Caritas urget nos!*

And then? Then consider the approach to one of our communities that devotes itself to young drug users (from 12 to 18 years of age, therefore less difficult to savage since the devastating drug use has not possessed them too long). We donate some animals to them, calves for example or ponies or, more economically, small animals from a barn.

The experience teaches us that the benefits which the youngest draw from these gifts are important. To take care of another young life, dissuades them from a destructive life style – a marvellous change – those youths saved from their obsession. Taking an interest in beings weaker than they are will make young persons highly responsible and will lead them out of the tunnel.

And now the problem – an agony of the big cities – the homeless, so-called *barboni*, is brought to each one of us. In the city of Rome it is calculated

that there are no fewer than four thousand.

Courage! Let us go and look for them. We will find these our less fortunate brethren (many middle aged between 35 and 50) in the underpass of streets, in underpasses of the big and medium train stations, and under the elevated train tracks. And we distribute blankets, scarves, heavy sweaters, trousers, mittens, gloves, caps, sandwiches, hot milk, hot coffee, the chocolate, fruit, toothpaste, and when necessary (often) aspirin.... And we convince physicians, dentists and oto-laryngologists to come with us, And we give above all affection!

We do not limit to Christmas time the lunch we offer to them.

And we collaborate – to comfort many with our own professional techniques of medicine, psychology, and law – in counselling centres, centres of assistance for the adolescents, centres of assistance for young spouses and adult couples. And wherever possible, we open other centres. We multiply our centres of aid (with food, with medicine, with payments for light, electricity and gas, with a little subsidizing money) in the quarters of the most deprived suburbs. This is an outflow of fraternity to those nuclear fami-

lies held together by a mixture of misery, of degradation, of despair!

We visit homes of senior citizens living alone – how sad is there loneliness. We bring them material assistance and comfort of company.

And what about terminally ill adults? We go to their bedsides, careful not to shed tears, to give Christian hope and human comfort. And we also are a practical presence especially in such dramatic moments as when the terminally ill are brought back to their families to die and the families collapse in total crisis. Here we must exert ourselves more than ever. We accompany the children to school, we clean the house, we substitute in the house for the spouse who goes to work...

And what about terminally ill babies? We organize for them small entertainments, we dress up as clowns, play with them, tell them stories...

* * *

And how do we conclude? In conclusion, we will not be “do-gooders”. May the Lord give us the grace and the fortitude not to weaken in our enthu-

siasm, to be constant, not to tire, and even be capable of “inventing” new forms of charity.

And hence we lend an attentive ear and become more open to opportunities to help so our heart never fails the suggestions of our volunteers, the young and younger who live “in trenches” near us, in the battle of charity.

It is clear that with the help of God we will do well. We will be the ones truly benefited when we can say, “I have such that I freely gave...”

With the Prophet Baruch we see, that “the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced. They were called, and they said, ‘Here we are’. And with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them”. (Baruch, 3,4)

Fra' Franz von Lobstein