

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

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and  
The Year of Faith**

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## FOREWORD

The thirteenth edition of the Order of Malta's "*Journals of Spirituality*" is coming out and it aims to be a contribution for its profitable celebration, together with the various initiatives which will be taken by the Order and local ecclesial communities.

The articles in this publication offer an attentive reflection on the faith for the members of the Order, which has *tuitio fidei* in its many implications as its inspiring principle.

Next year the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope Paschal II's Bull *Pie postulatio voluntatis*, a fundamental document for the Order of Malta, will also be celebrated. It is illustrated in this Journal and also in a detailed Note, distributed by the Communications Offices via intranet.

A.A.



## SPREADING THE GOSPEL TODAY

(Translated from Italian)

The growing dechristianization with which we must compete, particularly at the beginning of a new millennium, has made it increasingly urgent to engage in the new evangelization that John Paul II already recommended and that Pope Benedict XVI has proposed to the Church as a whole both with the establishment of a special dicastery “For the New Evangelization” and by declaring a special “*Year of Faith*”. It is only right that the Knights and Dames of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta – about to celebrate the 900th anniversary of its official recognition by the Holy See – should ask themselves about the special contribution they are called to give according to the “*tuitio fidei*” that forms the core of their glorious association. To answer this question it is perhaps best to start with a retrospective survey of the strategies which, over the centuries, Christians have used to spread the Gospel throughout the world. To do this I will refer to some lectures that Father Raniero Cantalamessa gave a few months ago to the Roman Curia.

Simplifying, we can pinpoint four particular moments in which we find a special missionary impetus in response to singularly difficult situations. Obviously our thoughts go first to the Gospel proclamation during the first three centuries of the Church's life, up to Constantine's edict. At that time Christianity gained ground exclusively by its own strength. There was no "secular arm" to support it, nor was there the prospect of material advantages. Becoming a Christian was a decision to swim against the current, often at the risk of one's life. In some ways the same situation is now being experienced in various parts of the world, and I would like briefly to examine it.

It is undeniable that, despite the hostile atmosphere, the Gospel proclamation soon gained ground. The reasons are as follows. An initial barrier, that of race, was surmounted on the very day of Pentecost; after Peter's discourse in the Jerusalem square "some three thousand people" – coming from many different regions (cf. Acts 2:9-11) – asked to be baptized (cf. Acts 2:41). Very soon the toughest barrier, the religious one, was also surmounted: in Cesarea Peter, seeing that the Holy Spirit had descended on the



house of the Roman centurion Cornelius, baptizes the people gathered there (cf. Acts 10:47s.). Christianity advanced rapidly in the following years despite the persecutions it triggered. Many sought an explanation for this development. One of the most convincing was A.von Harnack's who, in his fundamental work *Mission and Propagation of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, attempts to give only a rational explanation. But Jesus himself had already given the real response with two short parables: that of the seed scattered upon the ground – whether the sower sleeps or rises, night or day, the seed sprouts and grows (cf. Mk 4:26-29) – and that of the grain of mustard – the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet capable of producing such a large shrub that the birds of the air can make nests in it. Paul clearly understands the message contained in the two parables: *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth”* (1 Cor 3:2s.).

The fundamental lesson that we must also learn from the experience of the early Christians is to have confidence in the intrinsic strength of the evangelical

word. In the past Christians were not intimidated when faced with a world dominated by the wisdom of the Greeks and by the power of the Roman empire. So we today, faced with a world engrossed by technological progress and the possibilities offered by science, have to recover our faith in the strength of the word of God. Today's evangelizer must be able to say with the apostle Paul: "*since, then, we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed, therefore I spoke, we too believe and therefore speak*" (2 Cor 4:13).

Another great undertaking in the history of evangelization is surely that which took place after the Barbarian invasions (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries) brought about the fall of the Roman empire (476). At that time Europe had a profoundly different aspect: in place of the single Roman empire there were many separate dominions populated by tribes who, if they had contact with Christianity, had them with communities espousing the Arian version introduced by Bishop Ulfilas (311-383), who translated the Bible into Gothic. However, after an initial disorientation, culminating in the sack of Rome by Alaric king of the Goths (410), the Church once again took the initiative. With the help of great doctors such as

Augustine (*De civitate Dei*) and great popes such as Leo the Great, the Christian community understood that the radical remixing of peoples was not the end of the world, but rather the end of a world. Now one had to bring, with renewed confidence, the evangelical message to this new mission field. This occurred in two directions. Firstly *ad intra*, in the already Christianized territories. Hitherto the Church had really only established itself in the towns; it needed to extend its presence to the country villages, to the *pagi* as they were called in Latin, that still did not know Christ (hence the term “pagan” to mean “not Christian”). There was then the *ad extra* dimension, which aimed to take the Gospel to the Barbarians of insular, central and eastern Europe.

All the components of the Church were engaged in this enormous evangelization enterprise: the popes, who sent missionaries to Britain and Germany and the bishops, who sub-divided the diocesan territory into parishes, entrusting them to presbyters; however the true protagonists were the monks, who left their monasteries to take the Gospel to the Barbarians settled in insular Europe (St. Augustine and St. Patrick), in central Europe (St.

Colombanus and St. Boniface) and in eastern Europe (Saints Cyril and Methodius, apostles to the Slavs, who occupied the territories deserted by the migratory flows to the West).

The monks' decisive action during a crucial stage in the history of western Christianity reminds us, Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that the contemplative life is of fundamental importance for an effective evangelization. The great monks who re-evangelized Europe after the Barbarian invasions were men who left the silence of contemplation but returned to it as soon as circumstances permitted. Their most enduring work was the foundation of a network of monasteries in which flocks of young men were trained in the *lectio divina* and in the celebration of the liturgy, drawing from prayer the necessary strength to face often suspicious and hostile peoples. “*One who prays without speaking does more evangelization than one who speaks without praying*”.

I must now provide a necessarily brief note on the epic of the first evangelization of the American continent (16<sup>th</sup> century). As soon as Christopher Columbus returned from his travels recounting the existence of new lands on the other side of the

ocean, the Catholics in Spain and Portugal took action. Not only did they desire to gain political dominion over those regions but they were also aware that they had to bring the Christian faith to the new peoples. It was an enormous undertaking which did not lack its dark corners, but which also involved shining examples of generosity and courage, thanks to which those people were able to approach and know Christ. It was said that: *“the greatest thing that occurred in 1492 was not that Christopher Columbus discovered America, but that America discovered Jesus Christ”*. What I want to stress here is that, albeit during the first evangelizing wave the protagonists were the bishops and in the second the monks, in this third wave the indisputable protagonists were the religious: first of all the brothers of the traditional orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians) and then the Jesuits, whose *“reducciones”* in Paraguay have remained justly famous.

What can we learn today from the experience of the first announcement of Christ in the “new world”? The first thing is that people can promote the Kingdom of Christ on earth in different ways. In Latin America the apostolate among the people was

helped by the mendicant orders, but the apostolate among the learned provided by the Jesuits also gave a specific contribution. Each should thus be content that others do what he or she cannot. This applies among different orders, but it also applies to relations between members of an order and – why not? – also of the Order of Malta. We must therefore always bear in mind the apostle Paul’s reprimand to the Christians of those times: “Then let us no longer judge one another” (Romans 14:13).

We should also remember that there is today the problem in this area of the exodus of Catholics to other sects. If we ask ourselves why this occurs it seems the answer lies in the desire that each of us has to belong to a group that takes care of our needs. If this is true, it is easy to see the possibilities for the Order of Malta’s members in the field of evangelization, precisely thanks to the rapid and attentive exercise of the *obsequium pauperum* that constitutes their fundamental characteristic. The secret lies in sharing. In this sense an extraordinary contribution can come today, as it did then, from the Virgin Mary, whose image in 1531 was printed on Saint Juan Diego’s *tilma* with the features of a humble young girl of mixed

blood: “the *Morenita*”. It was her smile that opened the way to the evangelization of those lands. The Latin American peoples saw in the “*Morenita*” their heavenly mother and hurried to place themselves under her mantle. Fra’ Toribio de Benavente, in his Historical Writings, says that the natives’ desire to convert exhausted the Franciscan missionaries – numbering around 60 – who sometimes baptized as many as 15,000 people a day. Over ten years (1531-1541) there were between seven and eight million conversions.

It would be interesting to investigate the other great missionary undertakings such as the one towards the East, begun by St. Francis Xavier in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or that towards the African continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Daniele Comboni and Cardinal Massaia. But this would take us too far away. We are more interested here in identifying the recipients of the Gospel proclamation in the western world – the Greco-Roman world, the Barbarian world, the “new world” – to reach the recipient we are focusing on today: this secularized, and in some ways post-Christian, Europe. A Europe with its cultural trends, its *scientism*, *secularism*, and *rationalism*, that are more or

less explicitly setting aside religion. We must now ask ourselves who should be the protagonists in a new message of salvation and how they should act. In the first three centuries, as we said, the protagonists were the bishops, in the second wave the monks, and in the third the Religious. These categories continue to be necessary today, but the Church is feeling an increasing need for particular support from the lay community to proclaim the Gospel in the West's neo-pagan scenario.

The Gospel proclamation to those around us must be made simply and directly: at home, in the neighbourhood, in the office, in the places where spend our leisure time. It should be a word-of-mouth message, and here the laity are an indispensable go-between: a lay person reached by the Gospel, living alongside other lay people, can affect another two and these in turn another four and so on; and since lay Christians are not just some tens of thousands like the members of the clergy, but hundreds of millions, they could have a major impact in spreading the benevolent light of the Gospel throughout the world. They have the advantage, in their daily life and work, of being in continual contact with others. They do



not usually have a profound knowledge of the doctrinal aspect of Christianity and here we should bear in mind a rather obvious assumption: if we want to re-evangelize a dechristianised world, we should not start with the Church's immense doctrinal heritage. We have to start, as at the beginning, from the basic *kerigma*: "Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification" (cf. Rm 4:25; 1 Cor 15:1-3); or in short: "*Jesus is the Lord!*" (Acts 2:36; Rm 10:9). There is a negro spiritual that beautifully expresses what I'm trying to say: "*If you cannot preach like Peter/ if you cannot preach like Paul/ go home and tell your neighbour/ that Jesus died for all*".

I am coming to the end and I would like to summarize the substance of what I want to say in the following points. I also refer to some reflections that Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, gave us during the Concistory last February.

We must first of all start by acknowledging that we all, even the most secularized, have an unquenchable spark of interest in life hereafter; we never stop wondering about what lies behind that "wall of shadows" through which we all have to pass on our death. The proclamation responds to an expectation that,

even unknowingly, each of us carries in our hearts. In this context “The Scream” by the Norwegian artist Edward Munch comes naturally to mind: a man on a bridge, in front of a tumultuous red sky, hands framing his wide open mouth, while he utters what we feel is a scream of anguish, a scream of despair. Isn’t this the description of the modern man who, having forgotten the meaningful cry of the *kerygma*, is left with having to scream his existential anguish?

Instead believers know the salvific *kerygma* and the words spoken by Christ, and especially by the risen Christ, are always echoing in their hearts: “*Do not fear*”, “*Do not be afraid*” (Mt 28:10; 10:26-31; Mk 6:50; Lk 12:32 etc.). A few hours before His Passion Christ reassured His Apostles: “*I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world*” (Jn 16:33). This is not a future victory, it is a victory that has already taken place: “*I have conquered the world*”: our unshakable faith is justified.

Again in the light of this *kerygma*, we have to realize that the proclamation does not primarily focus on a doctrine but on a person. God does not quench the thirst of the human heart with simple abstract

concepts but by personally meeting those who seek Him. At the origin of our faith lies our love for a Person.

This Person presents Himself to us as “the truth” in which all the essential questions of the human heart can find an answer. Familiarity with this Person must thus gradually lead to familiarity with all His Gospel. An important application of the Vatican Council II was the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, now more necessary than ever to overcome the “religious illiteracy” of so many believers. In the past, we learnt many things almost effortlessly, simply by growing up in a family and community of believers; this is no longer true today.

I was struck by something that Cardinal Dolan said during the Concistory I mentioned earlier. He was talking about a mass in St. Peter’s he had attended as a young seminarian at the American College, celebrated by Cardinal John Wright. “We thought,” said Archbishop Dolan, “he would give us a cerebral homily. But he began by asking: ‘Seminarians: do me and the Church a big favour. When you walk the streets of Rome, smile!’” “Joy is the infallible sign of God’s presence,” as Leon Bloy claims. We must

remember to perform the new evangelization not with a frown but a smile.

In conclusion, two particularly significant items for a Dame or Knight of the Order of Malta:

Firstly, to be heard the proclamation of the Gospel must be strengthened by the concrete demonstration of a love that takes care of the needs of others. The Order's Dames and Knights can testify to this with their own personal experiences. It is not an ethereal love, but a commitment involving voluntary service in hospitals, in the homes for the elderly, in orphanages, in soup kitchens and the like.

The second item concerns a commitment that was once habitual for a Knight of Malta: the testimony of blood. The Christian outposts were defended against the Turks by the sword. The contribution Malta's galleys gave at the battle of Lepanto is well known, but the Knights also intervened in numerous other occasions. At the beginning of their story in Jerusalem they were fighting Saladin to protect the Christian pilgrims. The Order then moved to the island of Rhodes, where it remained for two centuries. During those tumultuous times it constituted the furthestmost bulwark against the East for defend-

ing Christendom in the West. Finally, the Order took up residence on Malta where, for another two centuries, its Knights acted as sentries for Europe against the Turkish menace. Today an armed defence no longer has any meaning. In these times another sacrifice is requested of us Christians in the fight against the forces of evil: it is the daily martyrdom we have to endure if we do not want to betray the values of the faith; it is the sacrifice of a courageous testimony that does not shrink, when necessary, from going against current trends. It is in this courageous undertaking that the Dames and Knights of the Order have to distinguish themselves. The hope is that, encouraged by their example, many others will be able to believe in the words of the apostle John: “*the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*” (1 Jn,4:4).

Thank you for your kind attention!

*Cardinal Paolo Sardi*  
*Cardinalis Patronus*  
of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta



## THE YEAR OF FAITH AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

(Translated from Italian)

Over the last two years, Benedict XVI has often asked specific questions about the theme of this article, which we should attempt to answer with intelligence and creativity, with an approach capable of shaping and forming the new generations. Speaking in Germany to the Representatives of the Evangelical Church Council, he said that:

*“The absence of God from our society weighs upon us more heavily, the history of his revelation, about which the Sacred Scriptures speak, seems to be located in a past which becomes ever more distant from us. Should we perhaps give way before the pressure of secularisation, become modern by diluting the faith? Of course, the faith has to be thought out and especially lived out today in a way which is new, in order to become something which belongs to the present. But it is not the dilution of the faith which helps us here, but only living the faith fully in our world of today ... Tactical changes will not save us, will not save Christianity, but only a faith which is thought out and lived out anew, by means of which Christ and with Him the living God may enter into this world of ours”* (September 23, 2011).

On 22 December last, while addressing greetings to the Roman Curia he asked:

*“The question which time and again lies at the centre of disputes is: what is a reform of the Church? How does it take place? What are the ways of bringing this about and what are its objectives? With some anxiety not only believing members of the faithful, but even those outside of the Church observe how those people who go to church regularly are becoming older all the time and their number is in continual decline; how there is a stagnation in priestly vocations, how scepticism and unbelief are growing. What, then, must we do? There is an infinite number of discussions as to what to do so that this tendency may be reversed. Certainly, many things need to be done. But doing on its own does not solve the problem. The core of the crisis of the Church in Europe is the crisis of faith. If we do not find a response to that problem, if faith is not re-vitalised to the point where it becomes a matter of profound conviction and a real source of strength thanks to the encounter with Jesus Christ, all the other reforms will remain ineffective”* (Christmas Greetings to the Curia, 22 December 2011).

These and other questions highlight the necessity for a new *apologetics of our faith* to be formulated. It is not extraneous to believing; on the contrary, it is an



intrinsic part of the action with which one enters the logic of faith. First of all, the action performed has to be really free; the result of that total abandonment to God with which each person completely submits his or her intellect and will to Him (cf DV 5). Christians do not seem very enthusiastic about giving the reasons for their faith, at least over the last decades. Perhaps this is why there is a lack of conviction and a choice not to defend it. Without the force of reason, the resort to traditions or experiences will remain ineffective, especially in the presence of a culture that is becoming increasingly reliant on the certainties of science. This situation has gradually solidified, with the claim that a weary repetition of old formulas could constitute an insurmountable bulwark without realizing that they were instead becoming a quicksand.

There has been a radical change over these last decades; people have been enticed by secularism, summed up as: live and build the world *etsi Deus non daretur*, as if God did not exist. People today are fiercely jealous of their independence. Having severed any relation with transcendence, they have become allergic to anything speculative; they have

fallen into a kind of pragmatic empiricism in which facts and not ideas are valued. They limit themselves to the simple historical instant, the fleeting moment, in the illusion that only that produced by science is true. They unhesitatingly change their ways of thinking and living, becoming increasingly kinetic, always prepared to experiment. They want to be involved in absolutely everything even if it is greater than they are, especially if it draws them into that narcissism – no longer even hidden – that deceives about the essence of life. The process of secularism has caused an explosion of claims to individual liberty, affecting the sexual life, interpersonal and family relations, free time and work.

In short, a completely new situation has been created in which people seek substitutes for the old values, especially those expressed in Christianity. In such a scenario, in which people come to occupy the central position, the barycentre of every form of existence, God becomes a useless hypothesis and a competitor to be avoided, if not to be eliminated. This turning point occurs relatively easily, often abetted by a weak theology and a religiosity based more on sentiment and inca-

pable of revealing the vaster horizon of faith. In this context God loses His centrality.

Imagining that a mere renewal of the old formulas is enough to tackle this situation is a delusion we would be wise to discount. Although inventing novelties just to satisfy a rapidly changing modern world open to every experience is no solution either. We know that the path to take is not straightforward; it requires remaining faithful to the foundations of our belief and, precisely because of this, able to build something that is coherent with them, capable of being received and understood by people who are different than in the past. We are thus called to repeat with conviction the need to “*have ready the reason*” for our faith (1Pt 3:15), knowing that this must be done with “*courtesy, respect and a clear conscience*” (1Pt 3:16). Reminding ourselves of these three terms has its value for our programme. The presentation and the announcement by the Christians of the hope we carry within us must not turn to arrogance and pride on the basis of a certain sense of superiority over other doctrines. Hence the new evangelization must be supported by a new anthropological reflection

underscored by apologetics, presenting a Christianity able to communicate with the modern world. Faith has its own strength of credibility because it is based on the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

This path of the new evangelization is clearly marked; we are called upon to renew the proclamation of Jesus Christ, of the mystery of his death and resurrection, to arouse once again faith in him through the conversion of life. If our eyes were still able to see clearly the events that characterise life in our modern civilization, it would be easy to show how this proclamation still occupies a very special position. What we must encourage people to think about is the meaning of life and of death, of life beyond death; Jesus Christ cannot be excluded from these issues which touch human existence and which determine our personal identity. If the proclamation of the new evangelization is not strengthened by the element of mystery that surrounds human life and relates to the infinite mystery of the God of Jesus Christ, it will lack the effective power it needs to elicit the response of faith.

The *Year of Faith* which the Pope proclaimed with his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* is intended to be

an initial response to these issues. It coincides with two important anniversaries: the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (October 11, 1962) and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In addition, it will open during the XIII General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, convened to reflect on the theme of *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*.

These two important events, that will be recalled at the beginning of the *Year of Faith*, will enable us to reflect on the richness of the Council texts' teaching, still not fully recognized and lived today. It will be a propitious occasion for rediscovering them and for realizing that the path of the new evangelization has its own indisputable points of orientation in them.

But it will also be a chance to place the right emphasis on the need to approach catechesis from a different angle, recognizing the importance of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is described as a necessary instrument for the new evangelization since it highlights the unity that exists between the act by which we believe and the content of the faith. A widespread, but extremely dangerous, trend proposes

justifying the fact of being Christians independently of the knowledge of its content. The act of faith is justified precisely by the knowledge of the mystery to which one gives one's assent; because of this global and unitary knowledge, believing is a free act and not a weary following of tradition. Finally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can help the new evangelization to overcome a difficulty present in the different Churches which limit catechesis to the sacraments alone, an approach now showing its limits. If it is addressed to the sacraments it is evident that, once the path of the Christian initiation has ended, there is a risk of drifting away during the ensuing formation. It's time to resume with conviction a path of constant formation, addressed to all the faithful, respecting the different stages and methodologies, but with the aim of understanding the Christian mystery for an existence in harmony with what one believes, a perspective that once again finds a valid instrument in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* the Pope speaks of the significance of the *Year of Faith*: “*We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to pro-*

*fess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope. It will also be a good opportunity to intensify the celebration of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist, which is 'the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; ... and also the source from which all its power flows' (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10). At the same time, we make it our prayer that believers' witness of life may grow in credibility. To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year" (n. 9). The Year of Faith thus intends to support the faith of the many believers who, in their daily trials, never cease to entrust their lives to our Lord Jesus, with conviction and courage. Their precious testimony, which does not make the news, but is precious in the eyes of the Highest, is what enables the Church to present itself to the world today, as she did in the past, supported by the strength of the faith and the enthusiasm of ordinary people. It will be before anything else a time of grace, an opportunity which the Church, firm in the certainty that derives from the faith in Jesus Christ, the only saviour, can offer to the many people who feel nostalgia for God and who desire to rediscover him.*

Christians must feel the responsibility of offering the company of faith when reaching out to those who ask for the reason for their belief. This is the core theme of bearing witness to the faith, which cannot be replaced by other forms of communication, however powerful or modern they might be. Faith is transmitted from person to person. This has been understood by the many people who, in the parishes and dioceses, as well as in movements and associations old and new, have put themselves at the service of the new evangelization, bearing witness to the Gospel in the various scenarios of their daily life. They have accepted the challenge because they are responsible, like all the baptized, for announcing and living Christ's Gospel. In the present historic and cultural scenario this is an almost titanic effort; it certainly requires a greater abandonment to the action of grace so that salvation can again be understood and accepted as a gift that offers certainty to the fragility of personal existence.

The experience of Grace is real in the liturgy and in the celebration of the sacraments, in which Jesus renders his salvation present and visible.



Among the sacraments, together with the Eucharist we have to recall the fundamental role of the sacrament of Reconciliation, not only for the experience of faith that enables a perception of the mercy of God the Father, but also for its anthropological value. It helps to respond to the nostalgia for God that is often found in the hearts of our contemporaries and enables them to feel a new relationship with other people, for whom they once again feel a sense of responsibility.

It is thus evident that the *Year of Faith* will not be a purely celebratory year. There will be many events that will involve the universal Church and that will take place in Rome. The various dioceses, parishes, movements and associations as well as religious orders will also find a way to give particular emphasis to this important moment in the life of the Church. But this year, as mentioned earlier, will be above all a time of grace to rediscover the treasure of the faith. Thus, as a common “sign” of this *Year*, an effort will be made to ensure that the *Credo* once again becomes a daily prayer, learnt by heart as it was during the early centuries of Christianity, according to St. Augustine:

*“Receive, my children, the Rule of Faith, which is called the Symbol (or Creed). And when you have received it, write it in your heart, and be daily saying it to yourselves; before ye sleep, before ye go forth, arm you with your Creed. The Creed no man writes so as it may be able to be read: but for rehearsal of it”.*

I would like to end this reflection by once again citing Benedict XVI. A few days before he became pope, Cardinal Ratzinger was in Subiaco talking about the Europe’s crisis of culture. He said: *“Above all, that of which we are in need at this moment in history are people who, through an enlightened and lived faith, render God credible in this world. [...] We need people who have their gaze directed to God, to understand true humanity. We need people whose intellects are enlightened by the light of God, and whose hearts God opens, so that their intellects can speak to the intellects of others, and so that their hearts are able to open up to the hearts of others.. Only through people who have been touched by God, can God come near to people”.*

There is a recurrent *leitmotiv*, and it is that of the faith that has to be enlightened and lived; but there is also the challenge, for each of us, to be enlightened in our minds, with our hearts open and our gaze fixed on the mystery we profess. Otherwise it will be

impossible for God to return to today's world. The lived faith surrounds us, but it also asks us to set out markers that express love, *caritas*. Christians are those men and women who, in the course of these two thousand years, have obstinately persisted in giving value to what the world has always marginalized and considered hopeless and worthless. In this the Church's credibility regarding the core of her proclamation: love. In the circle which exists between faith and love, it is possible to verify the genuine nature of the relationship which unites us to the Lord. In faith we understand how God loves; in charity the extent to which Christians are faithful to His word is made clear.

I think the conclusion to *Porta Fidei* is very significant: “*By faith, Mary accepted the Angel’s word ...*”; “*By faith, the Apostles left everything to follow their Master...*”; “*By faith, the disciples formed the first community...*”; “*By faith, the martyrs gave their lives...*”; “*By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ...*”; “*By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names are written in the Book of Life (cf Rev 7:9, 13:8), have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus...*” (cf *Porta Fidei* 13).

The *Year of Faith* must allow us to continue this by saying: “*For the faith, we also give and bear our true witness*”, as the Book of Revelation teaches us.

*Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella*  
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Promoting New Evangelization

# THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THE TRANSMISSION OF FAITH IN TODAY'S WORLD

(Translated from Italian)

Before entering into the specific theme assigned to me, I think it appropriate to ask a basic question: can faith be “transmitted”?

If faith, as the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” (CCC) states, is a personal act (“*the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself*”, n. 166), this decision cannot be “transmitted”. The faith of Abraham – to give a famous example – is his *personal* act of obedience to the Word of God, and this act is his alone. It can be taken as an example, but to be transmitted it must be repeated by others, who have themselves to make the same obedience to God.

However – as we well know – there is not only this *subjective* and personal aspect of the faith: there is also an *objective aspect*, made up of contents (expositions, rituals, behaviours), that are the *object* of teaching and can thus be transmitted. All this enables us

*“to express the faith and to hand it on, to celebrate it in community, to assimilate and live on it more and more”* (CCC, n. 170). Already in the Epistle of Jude we find the exhortation *“to contend for the faith, which was delivered unto the saints”*, that is to all believers, *“once for all”*.

It is important to bear in mind these two aspects of the experience of faith for the purposes of our reflections. I shall divide them into three parts.

*The first part* will focus on Irenaeus (+ 202). Born in Asia Minor, disciple of the bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, he represents in some way the Fathers of the eastern Church; instead *the second and third part* will be dominated by two great bishops, Ambrose (+ 397) and Augustine (+ 430), standard bearers of the western tradition.

In particular, *in the first part*, dealing mainly with the doctrinal aspects, we shall see how Irenaeus created the oldest “catechism of Christian doctrine”. Here I shall speak principally of the transmission of the faith *in an objective sense*, that is of the *contents* in which we believe.

*In the second part*, concerning Ambrose and Augustine, we shall see how our Fathers witnessed

the faith as *a personal life choice*: because, albeit it is true that the act of personal faith cannot be “transmitted” it can and must be effectively “witnessed”.

*In the third part*, finally, we shall see how those two formidable pastors, Ambrose and Augustine, educated their people in the faith. As we gradually progress in our reflections, we will realize that *transmitting the faith*, *bearing witness to the faith*, and *educating in the faith* are distinctions that only apply up to a certain point in the Fathers’ minds and pastoral practices. They realize that the integrity of the doctrine and the witness of life must proceed at equal pace, as they are both indispensable in the transmission and in the journey of faith.

### **Irenaeus of Lyon: What Faith to Transmit? What Are the *Objective Contents* of the Faith?**

Irenaeus is not an academic, but a man of faith and a pastor. As a good pastor he has a sense of proportion, is well-versed in doctrine and possesses a missionary fervour.

As a writer, he has a twofold aim: to defend the true doctrine from the assaults of the heretics (espe-

cially the Gnostics) and to illustrate with clarity the truth of the faith. These aims are set out in his only two surviving books: *The Unmasking and the Refutation of the False Gnosis* (or *Against the Heresies*, as we call it; the Greek original has been lost but we have a probably very literal Latin translation) and *The Exposition of the Apostolic Preaching*, (the oldest “catechism of the Christian doctrine”; we do not have the original of this work either, but at the beginning of the last century an Armenian translation was discovered).

Irenaeus is the champion of the fight against Gnosticism. But his writings go well beyond a simple refutation of heresy. One could say – with a little emphasis – that Irenaeus is the Church’s first “systematic theologian”. Among the most important aspects of his doctrine there is precisely the issue of the *rule of the faith* and of its transmission.

The responsibility for conserving and correctly explaining the rule of the faith – expressed in the Apostles’ *Credo* and transmitted by them to the bishops (the Apostle John’s *Credo* is the same as that of his disciple Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and it is the *Credo* of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, disciple of Polycarp) – is the Church’s alone, which received the



Holy Spirit precisely for this. Thus the true teaching is that imparted by the bishops, who can prove they received it by unbroken tradition from the Apostles, since Christ entrusted it to them. We must have a special regard for the teaching of the very great and very ancient Church of Rome. It has the “greatest Apostleship” originating from Peter and Paul, the pillars of the Apostolic college and all the Churches have to agree with her.

These are the arguments that Irenaeus uses to confute the claims of the heretics: first of all they do not possess the truth, because they are not Apostolic in origin; secondly, the truth, and thus salvation, is not a privilege or monopoly of the few, but all can achieve it through the preaching of the Apostles’ successors and above all of the Bishop of Rome.

In particular – still arguing against the secret and elitist nature of the Gnostic tradition and its multiple and contradictory consequences – Irenaeus attempts to describe the genuine concept of the Apostolic tradition. He does not just define the concept of the *transmission of the faith* but illustrates it in a dynamic way. The faith must be transmitted as it really is: that is *public, unique and pneumatic* (entrusted to the Spirit of God).

On the basis of these characteristics one can initiate a fruitful instruction for a correct transmission of the faith in today's Church.

### **Ambrose and Augustine: How to *Bear Witness to the Choice of Faith***

I shall speak first of all of the meeting between Ambrose and Augustine, drawing some significant conclusions on how our Fathers “bore witness to the faith”. We must patiently trace the circumstances of this famous encounter, certainly one of the most remarkable events in the history of the Church.

Tormented by a restless search for the truth, disillusioned by the Manichaean doctrines and frustrated by his undisciplined pupils, in 383 Augustine leaves Carthage and goes to Rome. He is twenty-nine, and it could be said that he has reached his maturity. But inside he is more perplexed and anguished than ever: nothing seems to offer him solid guarantees for achieving that truth to which he aspires with all his being, as the ultimate meaning of his existence. Moreover, in his teaching he encounters various

problems because, — as he himself confesses — “*at Carthage, there is intemperate license and the scholars as Furies perturb the discipline*” (*Confessions* 5,8).

Thus Augustine’s departure from Carthage on that night of 383 resembles a flight. Monica is aware of her son’s critical state and thinks he shouldn’t leave in that state of mind. Augustine has to resort to a stratagem. “*My mother,*” he recounts, “*shed a flood of tears and went with me as far as the sea. But I deceived her, simulating that I wanted to remain there, in order not to leave a friend alone until the wind picked up and allowed the ship to weigh anchor (...) And yet, refusing to go back without me, I could persuade her to remain that night in a small church quite close to our ship. And that night I secretly left, and she stayed in prayers and weeping*” (*ibidem*).

Neither Monica nor Augustine realized it, but the flight from Carthage constitutes the start of the central episode in Augustine’s life, his encounter with Ambrose, culminating in his conversion and baptism.

After leaving Carthage, Augustine’s initial destination was Rome. But the impact with the Roman environment was another terrible disillusionment. Augustine had hoped that the Roman students would be more disciplined than the African ones: but he

found that in Rome the pupils were even more deceitful, and did not even pay their teachers.

Augustine is already embarked on this depressing experience when the prefect of Rome, Symmachus, receives a request from the imperial court (at that time residing in Milan): there is a vacancy for a professor of Rhetoric. It was a prestigious post, since the holder of the chair of Rhetoric in Milan was in some way the official orator of the imperial court. Symmachus immediately thinks of Augustine who accepts and arrives in Milan on the *cursus publicus* (a state-run transportation service). We are now in the autumn of 384.

The young professor immediately starts out – as was customary – on his courtesy visits to the various civic authorities and thus meets Ambrose the bishop. Our source is again the fifth book of *Confessions*. Here Augustine recounts that Ambrose greeted him *satis episcopaliter*. What did Augustine mean by this rather mysterious adverb? Probably that Ambrose greets him with the dignity pertaining to a bishop, in a paternal manner but a little distant.

It is certain that Augustine was fascinated by Ambrose; but it is equally certain that the private

meeting during which Augustine wanted to consult him on the Holy Scriptures was day after day postponed. It could even be said that Ambrose was unfriendly towards Augustine, and that he had little or nothing to do with his conversion.

Yet Ambrose and Augustine met more than once, albeit Ambrose kept the conversation on general matters, often praising Monica and congratulating Augustine on having such a mother. Whenever Augustine went to see Ambrose, he would regularly find him taken up with crowds of people full of problems for whose needs he did his utmost; when Ambrose was not engaged with them (which was but a little time) he was either restoring his body with the necessary sustenance or nourishing his spirit with reading.

Here Augustine marvels because Ambrose reads the Scriptures with his mouth closed, just with his eyes. In the early Christian centuries reading was conceived of strictly for proclamation, and reading aloud also facilitated the reader's understanding. That Ambrose could scan the pages with his eyes alone suggested to the admiring Augustine a singular ability for reading and familiarity with the Scriptures.

Augustine often sits to one side, discreetly observing Ambrose; then, not daring to disturb him, he quietly leaves. “*Verily,*” Augustine concludes, “*no opportunity could I find of ascertaining what I desired from the mind of so holy a prophet, unless the thing might be entered into briefly. But those tails of mine required to find him at full leisure, that I might pour them out to him, but never were they able to find him so*” (*Confessions* 6,3).

These are very serious words: so serious that we are prompted to doubt Ambrose’s pastoral care and his real care for people. Personally, however, I am convinced that this was an authentic strategy on Ambrose’s part and that it effectively represents how he transmitted and witnessed the faith.

Ambrose knows all about Augustine’s spiritual situation because he enjoys Monica’s confidences. So can we believe that Ambrose doesn’t notice Augustine when he enters his room and sits in awe on the side while the former reads? No, it’s just that the bishop didn’t think it appropriate to engage in a dialectical argument with Augustine, which Ambrose could even have lost...

So Ambrose keeps silent, letting the facts speak for themselves, because he believes that faith is not

transmitted only with words but has also to pass through a life of witness. But what are these facts?

Firstly, the witness of Ambrose's life full of prayer and service to the poor. Augustine is greatly impressed by the fact that Ambrose reveals himself to be a *man of God and a man totally given to serving his brethren*, especially the poorest. Prayer and charity, to which this formidable pastor bears witness, take the place of words and human reasoning. The other fact that speaks to Augustine is the *witness of the Milanese Church*. A Church strong in its faith, gathered as a single body in its holy assemblies, of which Ambrose is the leading force and maestro (thanks also to the famous *hymns* he composed and set to music). This is a Church capable of resisting the demands of the Emperor Valentinian and his mother Justina, who in early 386 had once again tried to requisition a church for the Arians' ceremonies. In this church, Augustine tells us, "*the devout people watched, ready to die with their bishop*". This testimony of the *Confessions* is precious because it points out that something was moving inside Augustine, who continues: "*We too, although spiritually tepid, shared in the excitement of the whole people*" (*Confessions* 9,7).

Augustine, albeit not succeeding in having a face-to-face discussion with the bishop Ambrose, is influenced by his life, his spirit of prayer and his charity towards others. He is also impressed by the fact that Ambrose is a man of the Church: he sees him engaged in organizing the liturgies, in accepting the challenge of building a united and mature Church. Hence Augustine becomes fertile ground for the seed of faith.

It is easy to see the relevance of this story and I shall just propose a few points to reflect on.<sup>1</sup>

We often come across pastors or catechists who are disheartened when they realise their message lacks incisiveness. Instead of conversions like Augustine's, we are now experiencing an alarming breakdown in the commitment to values. But I would like to ask the disheartened pastor or catechist:

- Do you pray? Do those whom you are educating in the faith see you pray? Do they realize that you're a man of God, a man of the Word? In other terms, what is the contemplative dimension of your life?

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<sup>1</sup> These considerations are valid for the Chaplains as well as all Members of the Order of Malta who, taking on the charism of *tuitio fidei*, engage themselves to witness and protect the faith.



- Do you perform charity? Do you know how to accept the “poor”, the most needy, the least likeable, that person everyone steers clear of? Do you know how to reach out? Do you know how to be with others, giving your whole life (and not just some words) to the recipients of the Gospel? Do you sympathize with them, even when it seems a waste of time?
- Do you love the Church? Do you do your utmost to contribute to its edification both in the liturgy and in your daily life?

### **Again Ambrose and Augustine: How to *Educate* in the Faith?**

At this point it must be added that – in *transmitting the faith* of the Church – Ambrose and Augustine used a particular itinerary of *education in the faith*.

*Ambrose’s catechetical theory* – In Ambrose’s pastoral ministry, education in the faith passed through three fundamental stages. We can argue about what is the most important, but they are all indispensable in any itinerary of faith.

- Ambrose's catechesis is *a very concrete catechesis* that claims to advise on life's choices and practical behaviour. He started, that is, *from moral instruction*, and this was the first thing that he found in reading the Bible: "*We have spoken daily upon subjects connected with morals*," he said to those listening to his catechesis, when he read them the stories of the Patriarchs or the maxims of the Proverbs, "*in order that being taught and instructed by these you might grow accustomed to enter the ways of the ancients and to walk in their paths, and obey the divine commands; in order that being renewed by baptism you might hold to that manner of life which beseems those who are washed*" (I *Mysteries* 1,1). On our part, we must recognize that faith grows through our experiences of life. Thus those who educate in the faith are those who promote positive experiences, concrete attitudes and facts that enable this fecund circularity between faith and life.
- Secondly, Ambrose's catechesis *has a strong dogmatic-doctrinal dimension*. The faithful – already "washed" in the first stage – are pre-

sented with the Roman *Symbol* with its twelve fundamental articles. This “breviary of faith” is commented so that they can assimilate it and then transmit it, bearing witness to it with their words and their lives (*Commentary on the Symbol* 2). Those who educate in the faith must possess a specific theological competence. This cannot be improvised, especially since one should respect the *depositum fidei*: those who educate in the faith are not delivering their own message; the message they deliver goes beyond them and will still be transmitted after them.

- Finally, Ambrose’s catechesis *leads to the sacraments*: the pastor accompanies the faithful into the universe of the spirit, raising the veil and communicating a new visual ability, enabling them to experience salvation in the here and now of the liturgical celebration (the Sacraments). “*Thou didst go*”, says a famous text by Ambrose, “*hou didst wash, thou camest to the altar. Thou didst begin to see what thou hadst not*

*seen before; that is, through the font of the Lord and the preaching of the Lord's passion thine eyes were then opened. Thou who seemedst before to be blinded in heart, didst begin to see the light of the sacraments"* (Sacraments 3,15). This is the point of arrival of the itinerary of faith. Those who educate in the faith are those who – showing the way – create and live the “sacramental dimension”, striving to bear witness to its essential value. In general, in Ambrose's education in the faith, life comes before concepts. This is the *realism of the faith*, already found in Ambrose's pastoral practices when recounting the story of his meeting with Augustine. Because for Ambrose the most important Thing (*Res*) is not the doctrine: it is a living Person, Jesus Christ. “*Christ*,” the bishop of Milan exclaims enthusiastically, “*is everything for us. Omnia Christus est nobis!*” (*De Virginitate* 16,99).

*Augustine's catechetical theory* - Here I will just recall a short work by Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction* addressed to Deogratias, deacon of Carthage – a “disillusioned catechist” – around

400. It is, as the title tells us, a short catechetical treatise, unique of its kind in Patristic literature. Also here we can pick out three fundamental points for a correct transmission of the faith.

- First of all *by recounting the salvific story*. Augustine claimed that those who educate in the faith must provide a complete history of salvation from “*the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1), up to the times of the Church. Naturally, they must focus on the essential facts passing rapidly over secondary ones. The central events in the history of salvation will emerge, especially the central event that is Christ, synthesis of all the others. Hence the continuity between the Old and New Testament: “*In the New Testament,*” writes Augustine, “*the Old is concealed, and in the New the Old is revealed*”. So the entire Scripture “*narrates Christ, and prompts us to love*” (*The First Catechetical Instruction* 4,8).
- Another aspect of Augustine’s transmission of the faith is that of *opening up to hope*, the

hope that comes from faith in the resurrection. This hope has a specific name: it is Christ risen (*The First Catechetical Instruction* 25, 46). “Because He was tempted, suffered and rose, Christ became our hope. You can see in Him your fatigue and your reward: your fatigue in suffering, your reward in resurrection. In this way He became our hope (...). Through labour, temptation, sufferings, death, Christ let you see your present life, through resurrection He lets you see your future life (...). In this way He became our hope in sufferings and temptations and now we are on the way towards hope” (*Commentary on Psalm* 60, 4).

Augustine, who at 29 years old was “desperate”, became one of the Church’s greatest singers of hope. For this passage, the encounter with Ambrose was decisive, as well as the Baptism administered by the Bishop of Milan on Easter night on the year 387.

There is a lesson for us: those who transmit the faith should be men or women of hope, ready to give reason of their own hope.

- Finally, those who transmit faith *give joyfulness*: when you speak, Augustine tells us, try “*not to be tedious, but express yourself in an agreeable manner*” (*The First Catechetical Instruction* 2,3). Here we seem to hear don Bosco when Augustine states that, if there is joy, those being taught “*speak in us what they hear, and we learn from them the things we teach*” (*ibidem* 12,17). Those who educate in the faith, and again I refer to don Bosco, are people who “*strive to make themselves loved*”, understand and share the believers’ interests, likes, conditions and expectations to lead them joyfully to meet the Lord.

“*In keeping with the believer’s varying feelings,*” Augustine continues, “*my discourse itself opens, proceeds and closes*” (*ibidem* 15,23). And I conclude here my reflections. But the message of the Fathers who came before us continues to question each of us, inviting us to revise not certainly the *regula fidei*, but the figure and the method of those who transmit faith today in the Church.

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## THE MEMBERS OF THE ORDER OF MALTA AND THE YEAR OF FAITH

(Translated from Italian)

In number 12 of the Order of Malta's "*Journals of Spirituality*" H.M.E.H. the Grand Master urged Members to take up the challenge posed by the celebration of the Year of Faith, beginning in October 2012.

To answer this appeal I propose some simple guidelines:

1) **The Year of Faith** must confirm the Order's Members in the true faith. To grow in faith entails a commitment to grow in Christian life. The Order's Members have an invaluable means of assessment and formation at their disposal in the book "**Regulations and Commentary**". In the general introduction and in the introductions to the Three Classes it gives benchmarks for verifying if one's life corresponds to the Christian ideal and to that of a Member of the Order of Malta. A realistic assessment of the commitments deriving from Baptism and Membership in the Order must lead to a conversion, that is to a serious inner change.

When addressing the candidates for Confirmation from the Archdiocese of Milan who filled San Siro stadium on June 2, 2012, the Holy Father stated clearly that holiness is “*the normal path for Christians*”. This path is illuminated in the Year of Faith by the splendour of truth and the graces of the Spirit “*lumen cordium – light of hearts*”. We must be convinced that growth in Christian life is a condition and guarantee for being credible witnesses.

2) **To bear witness.** It is very important to think deeply about our duty, as Christians and Members of the Order, of witnessing to the faith. This helps us to reflect on the First Letter of the Apostle Peter: “*Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others. If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of God, if anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God...*”(1 Pt 4:10-11).

We must first of all acknowledge that we have received a gift. The word *gift*, when it is given by God, is overarching. It covers many things, and first of all the vocation for faith with the grace that accompanies us in our life, in the family, in the church and in

work; and also personal endowments, friendship, a healthy environment... Belonging to the Order of Malta is also a gift. We can truly say we are surrounded by “*God’s multiform grace*” which we must administer.

In this light we will attempt to feel, in this Year of Faith, a personal responsibility for putting this *gift* at the service of others.

3) Let us therefore follow **the counsel of the Apostle Peter**: “*If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of God*”.

“*Words of God*”. This pregnant expression by the Apostle first of all poses a question: what is our relationship with the Word of God? Do we know the Sacred Scripture? The Bible, the Gospels are certainly in our bookshelves at home, but are they often taken down and read? Francis of Assisi read the Word of God with love; it was carved in his heart and he followed it *sine glossa*. Read the Word of God and listen to it: “*The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts more incisively than any two-edged sword: it can seek out the place where soul is divided from spirit*” (Heb 4:12).

“*If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of God*”.

The Word of God – according to the Gospel parables – is also like the seed and leaven which bear an innate strength of development and growth: in the Year of Faith we are called not only to draw closer to it but also to spread it. Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, spoke of the Gospel being transmitted from person to person: “*Form of proclamation whereby an individual’s personal conscience is reached and touched by an entirely unique word that he receives from someone else*” (EN n. 46).

Do the exchanges which form part of our social life reflect Peter’s admonition: “*If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of God?*”

4) **The Apostle Peter** in his First Letter gives **us equally pertinent advice**: “*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope*” (1Pt 3:15). “*Your hope*” means possession faith. Dante, quoting St Paul in his *Divine Comedy*, writes that: “*Faith is the substance of the things we hope for*” (Paradise, canto XXIV). At the beginning of his Encyclical *Spe Salvi* Benedict XVI, reflecting on hope, said: “*‘Hope’, in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith – so much so that in several passages the words ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ seem interchangeable,*” and

adds: “*when the First Letter of Peter exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the logos – the meaning and the reason – of their hope (cf. 3:15), “hope” is equivalent to “faith”* (n. 2).

Thus Christians, and much more so Members of the Order of Malta, must be ready at all times to give the reason for their faith. This is not always easy in modern society. A profound knowledge of the truths of faith is required. In this sense the Year of Faith sets Christians a challenge of preparation, and with even more reason those in the Order.

In the Year of Faith the anniversary is celebrated of two events that have marked the modern Church: the *50 years since Vatican Council II opened* and the *20 years since the “Catechism of the Catholic Church”*.

In January 2012, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a Note containing pastoral indications for the Year of Faith. These include the invitation to study the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” that “*truly expresses what could be called the symphony of the faith*”.<sup>1</sup> In 2005 the “**Catechism of the Catholic Church**” was published. In the *Motu*

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<sup>1</sup> Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, October 11, 1992.

*Proprio* with which its *Compendium* is approved, Pope Benedict XVI describes it as “a kind of *vademecum* which allows believers and non-believers alike to behold the entire panorama of the Catholic faith”.

In the Year of Faith, as well as assiduously attending to the Word of God, we must also read, or better, study the “*Compendium of the Catechism*”. This 160-page text is easy to read; it has an appendix with a series of common prayers and formulas of Catholic doctrine. I have no hesitation in indicating it as an essential instrument in order to “*always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have*” (1 Pt 3:15). Another important tool for the young is the *Youcat* illustrated in number 12 of the “*Journals of Spirituality*”,<sup>2</sup> especially useful for educating the Order’s Volunteers in the faith.

5) I think the Apostle’s recommendation contains a **double commitment: educating in the faith and spreading the same faith**, as we see from

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<sup>2</sup>“The Origins of YOUCAT”, in “*Order of Malta and New Evangelization*”, «*Journals of Spirituality*» n. 12, Rome 2011, pp. 139–148.

the other part of the passage cited: “*if anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God*” (1 Pt 4:11). The propagation of the faith, which assumes a good knowledge of it, is contained in the Order of Malta’s motto *tuitio fidei*.

Besides the already-mentioned person to person, there are various ways of spreading the faith and there can be numerous catechesis initiatives, both in the parish and with special cycles of lectures promoted by the Order’s organisms. Naturally, the Chaplains have a special responsibility here, and also the Members of the Second Class should be in the forefront in the initiatives taken. It would also be a good idea for some of them to acquire a greater religious culture by attending theological schools.

A special catechistic programme for Volunteers is particularly useful, I would say even necessary. With its various charitable and relief initiatives the Order attracts a great number of Volunteers, especially young ones. With this, the Order takes on the duty of giving them a good education in the faith.

6) Among the pastoral initiatives recommended by the aforesaid Note of the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith, one is very close to the Order of Malta's tradition. The document, at n° 2, reports that: *“In the Year of Faith **Pilgrimages of the faithful to the See of Peter** are to be encouraged, to profess faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in unity with him [the Pope] who today is called to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith (cf. Lk 22:32). It is also important to promote **Pilgrimages to the Holy Land**, the place which first saw the presence of Jesus, the Saviour, and Mary, his Mother”*.

The 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Paschal II's Bull *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* also falls in the Year of Faith. An official Order of Malta pilgrimage to the See of Peter would be very significant to commemorate the first solemn document linking the Order of Malta to the Apostolic Seat. This would be a chance for Members to make a choral profession of the Catholic faith as well as their fidelity to the successor of Peter and Paschal II.

Some years ago a great number of the Order's Delegations made a memorable pilgrimage to the Holy Land. If it would be difficult to repeat in this form, smaller pilgrimages could be organized. Finally, the traditional **Lourdes Pilgrimage of May 2013** could be dedicated to the Year of Faith, illuminated



by the Virgin Mary “*who [.....] unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith*”,<sup>3</sup> as could the Italian Pilgrimage to Loreto and the other Pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries in the various countries.

*Archbishop Angelo Acerbi*  
Prelate of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta

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<sup>3</sup>II Ecumenical Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n.65.



## “REGULATIONS & COMMENTARY” AND THE YEAR OF FAITH

(Translated from French)

The many elements offered by the new version of *Regulations and Commentary*<sup>1</sup> include some clarifications about one of the charisms of the Order: with respect to *tuitio fidei*, R&C underlines that each time it is involved, it means “*preservation, protection and witness of the faith*”<sup>2</sup>. This clarification of the traditional charism duly reflects what has been expressed by the Holy Father Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* introducing the Year of Faith. Faith is no longer a “*self-evident presupposition for life in society*”<sup>3</sup> – even in the sectors where the Order of Malta recruits its Members. Therefore, each believer should reappropriate “*exact knowledge of the faith, so as to reinvigorate it, purify it, confirm it, and confess it*”, says the Holy Father

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the various editions – Italian, English and French – of *Regulations and Commentary*, Rome, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> In Italian: “*Alimentare, difendere e testimoniare la fede*”. In French: “*Fortifier la foi, la défendre et en témoigner*”. Cf. R&C, III, Introduction; XIII, art. 2, “Exercise of Apostolate” (for the Members in Obedience); XVII, “Apostolate” (of Professed Members).

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, October 11, 2011, 2.

using the words already used by Pope Paul VI.<sup>4</sup> This happy coincidence of intentions between the internal documents of the Order of Malta and the plea made by the Sovereign Pontiff to the Church as a whole urges us to read with even more attention the indications of *R&C* which invite to consolidate our faith to better witness it.

### *Fundamental Considerations*

One of the choices made in the editing of the new version of the *R&C* was to include a chapter of “fundamental considerations” common for all, before each category of Members of the Order. Therefore, the first indications are to be looked for in this chapter. After giving the above quoted definition of *tuitio fidei*, the *R&C* text starts by recalling that “*the fundamental basis of the faith is the knowledge of the Word of God*”.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the fundamental theme of the Second Vatican Council, the ardent desire that the believers take hold of the divine Word, as it was revealed to us, in particular through the daily liturgy; the Holy Father himself reflected this thought

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<sup>4</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *R&C* III, 2.

in his letter: “*We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church*”, urges him in the first paragraphs.<sup>6</sup> A fine distinction is to be underlined here: we should not carry out a free examination of the biblical text, but we should read the Scriptures within the Church, the way liturgy offers us each day and as explained by the tradition dating back to the Apostles. *R&C* invites us to develop an attitude to listening, freely and lovingly, to this tradition of the Church: “*All Members must be deeply committed to the principle of ‘sentire cum Ecclesia’, that is to be in consonance with the Church*”.<sup>7</sup> Finally, these general guidelines underline that “*knowing Christ is not only an intellectual process*”; accordingly, they invite to develop at the same time spiritual formation and spiritual life: “*the tuitio fidei presupposes a schola fidei (knowledge of the faith of the Church) and an exercitium fidei (formation and experience in spiritual life)*”.<sup>8</sup> These indications fully coincide with Pope Benedict’s requests, who asks us, in this Year of the Faith to “*rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed*”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *R&C*, III, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *R&C*, III, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 9.

It should finally be mentioned the very important passage which underlines the *specificum proprium* of the Order of Malta, to unite witness of the faith and service of charity:

*“Tuitio fidei and obsequium pauperum must be understood as a unity in diversity. The witness and protection of the faith remain incomplete without the devotion to ‘God’s poor’. Besides, this is the privileged place where Christ wants to be sought and found: here is the place where He wants His disciples to witness His presence and the God-given dignity of every human being. ‘Consequently, the best defence of God and man consists precisely in love’. In defending the Faith, the chivalrous person stands up for the true divinity of Christ, who shared in the flesh all the sufferings of mankind. In standing by those who are suffering he serves the true humanity of Christ who, also in suffering, death and resurrection, is God. Tuitio fidei and obsequium pauperum are service to the whole Christ and whole service to mankind.”*<sup>10</sup>

The Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* superbly echoes these indications: “*The Year of Faith*”, writes the Holy

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<sup>10</sup> R&C, III, 4.

Father, “*will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity [...] Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path [...] Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love*”.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Different Calls*

*Regulations & Commentary* then detail the different Classes of Membership in the Order: the vocation to the Order is one, but there are many ways to answer this call, from the commitment to service to the witness of the faith. For the Members of the Third Class, R&C insists on the witness that lay faithful should bring in the world they are living in, thus reflecting another of the fundamental principles of Second Vatican Council.<sup>12</sup> The text also underlines the importance for the Members of the Order to witness the faith when they find themselves facing doctrinal deviations “*especially in the ethical field*”; this is when it

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<sup>11</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. especially R&C IV, 2 and 3.

is most important, as the Apostle Peter exhorts: *“Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope you have”*.<sup>13</sup> Members should always benefit from the support given by Priories or National Associations, which are invited to take initiatives for the spiritual formation and development of the Members of the Order.

The same quotation from the Apostle Peter encourages the Members in Obedience to make an even greater effort toward loyalty to the Church and witness in the world:

*“To live in Obedience to the spirit of the Order requires the witness of faith and loyalty towards the Pope and the Catholic Church. It should also foster the faith and the ability to support an environment in which faith can grow, life can flourish and the dignity of the human being can be developed and protected. To this aim Members of the Second Class should feel even more obliged than the Members of the Third Class to become knowledgeable of the doctrine of the Church and the actual Church teachings to be able to ‘always be*

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<sup>13</sup> RC IV, 3.



ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope' (1 Pt 3:15)".<sup>14</sup>

Some indications given by R&C on formation of the Members in Obedience should be highlighted here: the importance given to annual Spiritual Exercises as a privileged place to deepen the faith in the spirit of the charism of the Order;<sup>15</sup> the reference to the great texts of the *Magisterium* on the apostolate of lay people, in particular the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* of Second Vatican Council.<sup>16</sup>

All these elements are to be found also in respect of Professed Members, who even benefit from a *ratio studiorum* which is given them in view of the formation of Aspirants and Novices. Chapter XX of R&C gives the key elements of this formation – first of all Liturgy: “*the main source of the life of the Church*” according to the teaching of Second Vatican Council, a quotation naturally recalled by the Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter.<sup>17</sup> The second element

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<sup>14</sup> R&C IX.

<sup>15</sup> R&C XIII, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 9

of formation – the Sacred Scriptures – is described as a *“pillar of the life of a Professed Religious”*. The text of R&C justly details how to approach the biblical text. Finally, R&C mentions the fundamental teaching of the Church as expressed in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church”. The indications of R&C fully echo the invitation to rediscover, on the occasion of the Year of Faith, the treasures offered by the *Catechism*. It is there, Pope Benedict XVI tells us in *Porta Fidei*, that *“the fundamental content of the faith”* receives *“its systematic and organic synthesis”*. *“Here, in fact”*, continues the Holy Father, *“we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in her two thousand years of history”*.<sup>18</sup>

### *Forming Oneself to Bear Witness*

It is easily understandable that these pillars of Christian formation are not exclusively reserved to Professed Religious – these are the basis itself of the formation of all lay faithful, *a fortiori* of all those who are, like the Members of the Order of Malta, *members*

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<sup>18</sup> *Id.*, 11.

of a religious order, regardless of their level of membership. Of course, Professed Members are required a greater commitment, a stronger loyalty, a deeper faith which enables them to be, in their turn, authorised witnesses: “*Aspirant and Novices should therefore acquire the knowledge and skills to be able to make the Teaching of the Church better known, by means of a Catechesis well formed and faithful to the Magisterium*” reads *Re&C*.<sup>19</sup> This is why it is desirable, for the future, that those who are studying to enter Profession in Order, as well as all those in the Order who are called to take on greater responsibilities, find places for formation where they may be helped in deepening the faith and the charism of the Order. Initiatives have already been taken in this direction; let’s hope that they may be successful. However, as witness concerns us all, formation must necessarily be available to all. Accordingly, all the Members of the Order could find it useful to participate in the many liturgical, biblical or doctrinal proposals offered by each diocesan Church or in the parishes. *Re&C* exhorts to participate in these initiatives, as well as in the life of parishes and Christian

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<sup>19</sup> *Re&C* XX, 10.

communities.<sup>20</sup> The Year of Faith will undoubtedly give rise to many local initiatives and naturally the Members of the Order are encouraged to take part.

In the last paragraphs of his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI, paraphrasing a passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews, lists all which faith produces in the life of men and women:

*“By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity, concrete signs of waiting for the Lord who comes without delay [...] By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages [...] have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus wherever they were called to bear witness to the fact that they were Christian: in the family, in the workplace, in public life, in the exercise of the charisma and ministries to which they were called”.*<sup>21</sup>

The Order of Malta has received this grace to live such a double witness: the one brought by the consecrated lives of its Professed Members and the

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<sup>20</sup> RC VII.

<sup>21</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 13.

one lay faithful bring into the world, in particular in the exercise of charity. May this Year of Faith – which for the Order is also the Jubilee Year of its 900 years of approval by the Church – help each one of us to live more intensely our vocation in the Order.

*Fr. Bruno Martin*

Conventual Chaplain *ad honorem*

Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St-Etienne



## SPIRITUALITY OF THE ORDER OF SAINT JOHN OF JERUSALEM

### **Spirituality and “Spiritualities”**

Spirituality is to us a derivation of the *Spiritus paraclitus*, the Holy Ghost, the third Devine person (third person in the Blessed Trinity) taking effect in the Church. In opposition to this, there is talk about “spiritualities” of various kinds – outside of faith and the Church, indeed even outside any kind of faith and religion. I definitely do not want to deal with these kinds of straying “spiritualities” in this context! It is difficult to define what spirituality is; mostly it is visible and describable from the specific and authentic way of living, from the spirit. In this sense my remarks intend to make spirituality tangible in the example of our Order.

### **FUNDAMENTS**

#### **The Holy Bible**

The Holy Testament of the Old and the New Covenant is the decisive spiritual basis for us as a Catholic and Christian order. As the Word of God, it is binding and obligatory for us. Especially in the

New Testament, Christ the Lord encounters us as the love of God turned into man; He himself is therefore the highest measure for any kind of deeds of charity.

Furthermore, we come across the impressing figure of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel – Christ recommends him warmly as an example for us. But, from the very beginning, the crucial statement for the spirituality of our Order is the passage of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:40b: *“In as much as ye have done it unto one of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”*. This passage from the Gospel is mentioned in the earliest documents of the Order and pledges us to recognize Christ the Lord himself in the poor and the sick. This is the reason why in German we say “die Herren Kranken – (“Herr” meaning the Lord – to show that we recognize the Lord himself in “our Malades”, the sick and the poor. We also say it in the German version of our Daily Prayer of the Order.

Over and above we have received a truly biblical prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours, to which certain Classes of our Order are obligated and others are invited.



## **The Church**

Our Order was established canonically as an ecclesiastic order. All Knights and Dames are bonded with this our Catholic Church in deep solidarity, gratefulness and love. As members of the Order we owe ourselves to the Holy Church. The criticism of the Church, to be heard all over in these days, does not correspond with the spirituality of Knights and Dames, especially as they intend to implement faithfulness, courage and constancy out of the ideal of chivalry.

## **The Saints**

### ***The Virgin Mary***

The deep and heartfelt devotion of the portrait of the Most Holy Virgin of Philermo in our Order goes to show that it is characterized and defined by Marian worship. It is from the Mother of God, that we may learn to accept God's will humbly, as she did on Annunciation Day, how she sang the *Magnificat*, and to hold out with her in suffering and death. We have received the entire Marian spirituality, which has evolved in the church during the past centuries in order to implement it in our lives today. Among the

most prominent elements of this Marian spirituality are the pilgrimages to Lourdes and the prayer of the rosary. The rosary has developed in various places, also among Knights of the Order, who have made their watch duty fruitful for the prayer of the rosary.

### *John the Baptist*

Our Order is called after John the Baptist, and Christ the Lord calls him the “*the Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven*”. This patron saint also gives us a spiritual inspiration: already from his mother’s womb he recognizes Christ as the coming Redeemer. It is here that the dignity of the unborn is visible. As members of the Order of Malta, we should therefore stand up for the protection of the unborn child – always and everywhere.

John the Baptist emphatically point to Christ: “*Behold the Lamb of God!*”

We follow him when we also refer to Christ, be it in the spoken word and in deed (even without word). John the Baptist stands up for the marital morality of his time and is ready for martyrdom.

### *Martin of Tours*

In the conclusion of his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (40) our Holy Father refers to St Martin of Tours, who shares his cloak with a beggar outside the town gate of Amiens; this was a true implementation of *obsequium pauperum*. St Martin was a soldier, as it were a knightly chivalrous figure, who then became a monk and even a bishop.

### *Blessed Gerard*

In his lecture in November 2011 in Lima, our Grand Hospitaller H.E. Baron Albrecht von Boeselager starts out with this text of Blessed Gerard: “*Our brotherhood will be an everlasting one, for the soil in which it is rooted is the misery of the world, and God willing, there will always be people who seek to reduce this misery and make distress easier to bear.*”

The above mentioned text of Blessed Gerard leads us into one of the deepest aspects of Christian spirituality: also the evil in the world is an immense mystery and as a consequence – unfortunately – eternal and everlasting. Despite all our action and doings we will never overcome it entirely. We must accept this matter of fact and try to overcome our drive to

succeed. “*The misery of the world is the biotope of the Order. Only in this ecosystem can it flourish.*”<sup>1</sup>

His Highness the Grand Master Fra’ Matthew Festing is very worried about the condition of the Order: in as much as there are too few vocations for the First Class – that is Professed Knights. “*The situation of the First Class [in our Order] is absolutely unsatisfactory*”. We must truly pray for vocations in the Order and create all preconditions, that a total dedication of their lives becomes attractive for young men in our Order. Only if we succeed here, the continued existence of the Order, as such in the structure of religious orders, will prevail.

### **The Holy Father, the Pope**

Starting off point in our spiritual reflections as to the topic Pope, is the fact that, as the successor of the Prince of the Apostles Peter, he indeed is the representative of Christ on Earth.

Starting from Pope Paschalis II on, many Popes until this day have written important documents for our Order. Time and again, these should be reviewed spiritually.

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<sup>1</sup> H.E. Baron Albrecht von Boeselager, VIII Conference of the Americas in Lima.

It is with great gratitude that I remember the speech held by our former Grandmaster Fra' Andrew Bertie on the occasion of the Austrian pilgrimage to Rome in 1995 at Villa Malta on the Aventin. With powerful and emphatic words, he appealed to the pilgrims to be faithful and obedient towards the Pope. Such a courageous faithfulness is – as mentioned above – a major and to the core chivalrous virtue.

### *Proprium of our Order*

#### *The Daily Prayer of the Order of Malta*

Our beautiful Daily Prayer of the Order expresses from the very beginning that a Knight of the Order is called by God. To be sure, the calling to the Order is a true blessing.

#### *The Eight Miseries<sup>2</sup>*

We are used to saying that upon entry into the Order, or into the works of the Order, that we are to fight against the eightfold miseries in the world. These

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<sup>2</sup> The Author refers to the Beatitudes, symbolized by the eight points of the cross of the Order of Malta. This reference is well known in the Order, and is also quoted in the Ceremonials for Investitures of some Countries. The connection with the Eight Miseries listed here above, against which the Order is called to act, although suggestive, is less well renown (Publisher's note).

are: sickness, homelessness, loneliness, hunger, guilt, disbelieve, disinterest and unkindness. Let us bear in mind, that Raymond du Puy in a very early rule of the Order stated, that the eight points of our cross above all refer to the eight beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3 ff). This may not be known to all of you, but this is only to reinforce that the spirituality of our Order is a positive implementation of beatitudes. From these, however, results the fight against the eight miseries – in the very intention of the text of Blessed Gerard, that we have already heard earlier.

### *Tuitio Fidei – Obsequium Pauperum*

These two terms are constitutive of our Order. However, they represent a fruitful tension as they depend mutually on each other. For 900 years, our Order feels obliged to serve the sick and the poor by virtue of its foundation. Here the Knights and Dames recognize Jesus Christ the Lord. Thereby they give evidence of the Christian faith in a very special way offering their very selves. The Knights and Dames want to help and heal with their service; thus they make God's caring for the people tangible. The Order has the mission to bear witness of the Gospel

towards the needy and the staff and volunteers in the works: and consequently lead the needy as well as the staff closer to Jesus Christ. (guiding principle or mission statement...).

This fruitful tension stands in deep inner consent with the remarks in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (Chapter 31c):

*“Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends. But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practise charity in the Church’s name will never seek to impose the Church’s faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) and that God’s presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love.”*

## ELEMENTS

### Competence

In the works of love and charity of our Order and its organizations, professional skills and competence are mandatory and required. Anything concerning medical care, fostering and nursing and disaster operations, etc. has to be done with utmost professional competence. Once more a quotation from *Deus Caritas Est* in Chapter 31a says:

*“Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heart-felt concern”.*

From this quote again we can feel the same tension that fascinated us in connection with *tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum*. In the first place, the important professional competence implies a proper and effective service of the sick. If it is missing, this is also a spiritual failure.



## The Prayer

From the fundamentals mentioned earlier, it is evident, that prayer is absolutely essential in the lives of Knights and Dames. Prayer prepares our deeds of love, our charity, supports it and gives it its final touch. It is very important for the other Classes of the Order to know and to witness, that the First and Second Class of the Order are obliged to say the Church's Liturgy of the Hours – just as it behooves for members of an order. The Liturgy of the Hours is naturally not the only kind of prayer, but it unites us with other religious and priests of the Church. During pilgrimages and other occasions, it should be an aim for other Classes of the Order to participate in the Liturgy of the Hours.

I would like to quote once more from the Encyclical, Chapter 36, precisely for the situation in the Order and its works:

*“People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact, that*

*time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor, but it is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: 'We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer!'"*

### **Living in Religious Faith**

In order to implement the *obsequium pauperum* with an authentic and credible background it is necessary, that Knights and Dames fulfill their tasks in matrimony and family, in working life and politics and in all other areas of life, in an exemplary manner as Catholics. We all know that our society has a huge deficit in this respect; and that is why a member of the Order of Malta is called in a very special way and he knows it. For the implementation of faith we need the activation of the Christian virtues. We definitely begin with the three Theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Love - and go on with the four Cardinal virtues – Justice, Wisdom, Courage and Moderation. All of this can only be mentioned at this point and is most probably known to all of you. One of the four Cardinal virtues, however, - namely Courage – leads

us towards chivalry, which comprises a number of noble and gentlemanly actions.

There are wonderful and inspiring texts by blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman, to the topic “Gentleman”. Starting from a deeply human Christendom, the Cardinal describes very precisely actions of the gentleman, whom we may well recognize as the knight. At random I quote the following passages:

*“It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain. This description is both refined and, as far as it goes, accurate.... The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome.... He is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets every thing for the best. He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out”* (“The idea of a University”, 1852)

## **Education and Formation for Preaching and the Propagation of Faith**

In a conversation with H.E. Archbishop Angelo Acerbi, the Prelate of our Order, I have learned, that religious education and formation of our members and of staff and volunteers in the works is of greatest concern to him. As a matter of fact, it is only possible to preserve and defend a faith that is known profoundly: *Tuition Fidei*. Unfortunately the lack of religious know-how is a main reason for the critical currents in the Church.

I don't mean only to acquire instructions for our volunteer work, but to get to know and to study the treasures of faith of the Church, in order to be in a better position to preach and propagate it. I am well aware of the fact, that various models have to be developed according to the Classes of the Order and the level of responsibility of the staff in the works. It is not possible to ask the same from a person serving in the works, who maybe is not as firm in his faith, as from a Professed Knight or of a Knight in Obedience. But in any case the Catechism of the Catholic Church is a highly suitable means for the instruction of the faith.

## The Sacraments

In my days as Spiritual Director of the MHDA (the volunteer corps in Austria), we already held emergency response drills on a regular basis; and once we were able to introduce a station called “sacraments”. Here the participants learned and practiced, how people in extreme situations could still be invited to receive the Anointing of the sick, in order to call for a priest in case of need. In such drills, the fact should also be mentioned, that an unbaptized person may ask for the Holy Baptism during a catastrophe. Everybody should know the correct established wording for the baptism. A Knight of the Order should know how to administer the sacrament of Baptism *in concreto*. In any case, with the right intention every person can do it.

## Dying and Death

Another experience – also from those days – has shaken me and thence has stayed in my mind: during the “simulated catastrophe” someone said without thinking: “*We don’t have to care about the hopeless cases of the dying from now on, we must save lives.*” It goes without saying, that saving lives has an enormous importance

to the Malteser disaster operations, (maybe even a priority); but to disqualify the dying as “hopeless” – and then even to give orders as to no longer help them – in my opinion, that is not compatible with our Christian and chivalrous spirituality. We ought to form a group out of all those volunteers in Order to dedicate themselves to those dying – particularly in the most important moment of their lives, on their way to God – and to whom we should give and show this hope.

### **The Holy Land and the Pilgrimage**

In historical terms, the Brotherhood of Blessed Gerard was founded already in the Holy Land – just before the actual crusades started. There had already been crusades in the earlier centuries, because from the beginning of Christianity, pious people wanted to see and visit the Holy Sites, where our Lord (once) walked the Earth. Therefore the *xenodochium* (pilgrims’ hostel and hospital) in Jerusalem, founded by Blessed Gerard, existed already before the year 1099. This goes to show that our Order was tied to the idea of pilgrimage from the very beginning. This is particularly true for the time of the crusades, when the Order took on military

duties to protect the pilgrimage routes.

What is more, the idea of pilgrimage is also a specific model for our lives, which we should transmit precisely also within the Order. We go on pilgrimage to Lourdes and other Marian holy sites with “our malades”, we go on pilgrimage to Malta and to Rhodes, the historical sites of our Order, we go on pilgrimage to Rome to the successor of Saint Peter and to the Holy Land. Our entire life is a pilgrimage: Quote from a German Church Song: *“We are only guests on Earth and with some grievances we go on pilgrimage without respite to the eternal salvation.”* The apostle says: *“We have here no permanent home, but we are searching for the eternal one.”* So this pilgrimage is also a considerable part of melitensic spirituality.

## **Conclusion**

I am well aware, that these ideas and fragments are incomplete. I hope, that they will nevertheless inspire to practice, deepen and reflect upon the spirituality of our Order.

I will conclude with the words from the beginning of Pope Benedict’s often quoted Encyclical. At the same time I would like to remind you of the fact,

that all deeds of love and charity, to which we are obliged, are tied to the “love” mentioned in this highly theological text: “*God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him (1 Jn 4:16)*”. These words from the first letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse St John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “*We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us*”.

We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, on his visit to the Monastery Heiligenkreuz, to which I belong, uttered the following idea, according the same lines: “*Our light, our truth, our goal, our salvation, our life – all of that is not religious teaching or doctrine, but a person : Jesus Christ, the Lord!*”

*Abbot Gregor Henckel von Donnesmarck, O. Cist.*  
Grand Cross Conventual Chaplain *ad honorem*  
Abbot Emeritus of the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz



**“PIE POSTULATIO VOLUNTATIS” OF POPE PASCHAL II  
IN FAVOR OF THE HOSPITAL OF SAINT JOHN  
OF JERUSALEM (1113)**

(Translated from Italian)

2013 marks the nine hundredth anniversary of the privilege Paschal II granted on February 15, 1113 to the hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, extending the protection of the Holy See to the Hierosolymitani *Xenodochii*. This anniversary is an opportunity for promoting interest in this papal privilege, already well known to the Order of St. John's historians but perhaps not sufficiently recognized by the Order's members and sometimes distorted in its historical importance by a certain political journalism. This document instead merits greater exposure for the contribution it has offered both to the development of the hospital in Jerusalem dedicated to St. John the Baptist and to the origins and evolution of the fraternity operating within it and to its transformation into a hospitaller and religious order.

This anniversary also falls within the “Year of the Faith” proclaimed by Benedict XVI on October 11, 2011 with his *Motu Proprio Porta Fidei* and is asso-

ciated with the Pope's statement on the intimate relationship between the life of faith and the consecration of the faithful:

*"By faith," the pope writes, "men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity, concrete signs of waiting for the Lord who comes without delay" (n. 13).*

The pope wanted to stress the importance of the witness of faith rendered through profession of the evangelical counsels and understood as an itinerary of personal perfection in Christ, undertaken in an eschatological perspective. Paschal II's privilege was granted within the framework of a few men's life of devotion who, for the faith and for the love of Christ while awaiting his glorious return, gave up their lives to serving their more needy brothers, having recognized in them the presence of the Lord who is coming.

To help understand the papal privilege and its significance I will examine its content and focus on at least three essential elements of this historic source, based on historiography and historical criticism.

## The document

Paschal II's privilege is dated February 15, 1113 in Benevento. It is addressed to Geraldus – to whom we will come back later – called *institutor* (founder) and *prepositus* (rector), as well as those who will legitimately succeed him in the Jerusalem hospital. The original parchment is in the Order of Malta's archive in the National Library in Valletta, Malta. It has been intensively studied by the Order's historians and has often been published. The latest version in 2002 was edited by Maroma Camilleri, with a detailed diplomatic analysis.

Like other correspondence issued by the papal chancery, this 1113 privilege is known by the first words after the end of the protocol: *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*. Externally, it has the trappings of a formal privilege, typical of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The entire first line is written in chancery style, sign of the solemnity and “gracious” content of the act. The document is commonly but erroneously indicated as a *bulła*, although this term was introduced only after the 13<sup>th</sup> century with the use of a hanging lead seal, still used today for some important pontifical documents, and

especially in the appointment of bishops. Instead the parchment of 1113 bears the *rota* and the *bene valete* monogram, with a series of bishops' and cardinals' signatures, headed by that of Paschal II, *Catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopus*. At the end there is the *recognitio* of Cardinal Deacon Giovanni da Gaeta, librarian and chancellor of the Holy Roman Church and future Pope Gelasius II.

Other elements useful for recognizing its character and content emerge from the document, which can be considered as an example of a *privilegia sollemnia*, and more specifically of a *privilegium protectionis et exemptionis*, in the form established in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and adopted for the entire next century. The initial *intitulatio* concludes with the *in perpetuum* formula indicating the high and lasting value of the privilege granted by the pontifical authority: it is not a temporary concession but a perennial grace. The origin of the concession – as one reads in the document – was, according to the practice of the time, a *petitio*, that is a request that Gerard presented to the Pope for the protection of the Apostolic See and the patronage of St. Peter for the church of St. John the Baptist and for the hospital he had founded

and ran in Jerusalem,

Paschal II had granted the grace, stressing the perpetuity of the concession through the words “*semper... persistere*”, at the same time stating his satisfaction in Gerard *piis hospitalitatis tue studiis* together with the sentiments of his paternal benevolence with regards to the Hierosolymitan hospital. The same benefice was renewed by Paschal II’s successors. In June 1119 Callistus II confirmed the concession *ad exemplar domini predecessoris nostri sancte memorie Paschalis pape, protectione sedis Apostolice communimus*. Innocent II did the same on June 16, 1135, in response to the request of *Raymundus*, new *prepositus* of the hospital, recalling Callistus II and Honorius II’s confirmations of the benefice bestowed by Paschal II.

## **Gerard Founder of the Hospital**

Before starting to analyse the contents of the privilege, I want to stress that this is the first time that the name *Geraldus* appears in a papal document together with the attribute of founder and rector of the Jerusalem hospital. Gerard is thus considered the creator of the hospital and in the Order of St. John

he continues to enjoy the veneration due to the saints. No serious historian has doubts about the historicity of his figure. There are differing opinions on his origins but the most accredited gives him Italian nationality and Amalfi citizenship.

Two of the most authoritative experts – Cosimo Damiano Fonseca and Errico Cuzzo – claim that Gerard held the rank of bishop. Cuzzo, in particular, sustains that the founder of the Jerusalem hospital is the Gerard elected archbishop *totius Galileae et Tyberiadis* by the monks of the monastery of San Salvatore of Tabor. This was at the instigation of Tancred of Hauteville, prince of Galilee, who wanted to establish an archdiocese to cover the territory of his principality. This was before the dioceses of Nazareth and Tiberias were established and in the meantime, on April 27, 1103, Paschal II granted the pallium to an abbot Gerard, appointed archbishop of Mount Tabor. This latter – according to Cuzzo – was the founder of the Jerusalem hospital, a respected and influential member of the Latin clergy, to whom Tancred turned to find support for his plan. Despite this the prince's plan never came into being because Paschal II had granted the use of the pallium

only to the Tabor church and to some festivities, but had neither defined nor set up any diocesan district. Hence the privilege of the pallium should be considered as the concession *ad personam* of a title, which probably constituted a physical person *sui iuris*. Moreover, a diocese *totius Galileae et Tyberiadis* never appears among the Latin seats of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Cuozzo concludes that in 1118, Gerard having died, “*the hospital at Jerusalem and the monastery of San Salvatore of Tabor, united in the person of the great hospitalarius, were divided*”.

I would conclude that the reasons adopted to suggest that two people with the same name were actually just one person, albeit authoritative, do not seem sufficiently convincing. First of all, we have to remember that the *privilegium protectionis* Paschal II granted on July 29, 1103 was addressed to the *venerabili fratri Giraldo, montis Thabor archiepiscopo, eiusque successoribus*, whereas the *pallium* was offered *serenitati tuae plenitudinem videlicet pontificalis officii, Apostolicae Sedis liberalitate*. The privilege was not granted exclusively to archbishop Gerard, but would be transmitted – as we read in the document – to *omnibus tuis successoribus*.

Another fact suggests that the Mount Tabor

archbishop was not the same person as Gerard the founder. The latter, in numerous documents before and after 1103, is always indicated as the person in charge of the hospital at Jerusalem, but is never nominated as bishop, and Gerard never calls himself thus.

Finally, it is surprising that Paschal II would write to the same person addressing him as *venerabili fratri nostro Giraldo* in 1103, whereas ten years later he addressed the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* to Gerard calling him *venerabili filio*. If this were so, it would be a *diminutio*, perhaps because the Pope had forgotten the fraternal relations in the episcopate (*venerabili fratri nostro*) that bound him to Gerard, or because this bond would have dissolved after ten years, which seems very unlikely.

In the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* Paschal II considers Gerard as his son and not his brother in the episcopate, whereas he gives him the title of founder and rector of the hospital at Jerusalem and makes no mention of Tabor. Equally, in another two letters of February 15, 1113, the same date as the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*, addressed to the bishops, abbots, nobles and faithful of Spain and Europe, the pope gives Gerard the sole title of *prepositus* of the hospital. It



thus seems improbable that Paschal II would have omitted to refer to Gerard as a bishop when he himself had conferred the pallium on him ten years earlier. It is much more likely that the pope was not referring to the archbishop of Monte Tabor.

### **St. Peter's Patronage**

Another element that proves the value of the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* as a historical source is connected – as already mentioned – to the origins of the Order of St. John and, more in general, to the history of the hospitaller orders, a hitherto little explored component of the vast history of the religious orders and of which historians have only just started to discover its richness and variety.

The provisions dictated by Paschal II concern all the legal effects consequent to the concession of the *patrocinium Beati Petri*. The first effect regarded the protection, guaranteed by the Holy See, of the assets, donations, incomes and gifts acquired by the hospital for treating and assisting pilgrims. The papal benefice confirmed the hospital's full independence from the Benedictine monastery of St. Mary the Latin in

Jerusalem to which it makes no reference at all, at the same time exempting it from any other jurisdiction that could have claimed dues including, in this case, the bishop's tithes for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. It was since the pontificate of Urban II (1088-1099) that the *protectio* granted by the Holy See had been understood as an exemption and those who enjoyed it were under the direct and exclusive authority of the pope, removed from any other ecclesiastic and political power.

The *patrocinium Beati Petri* also excluded any other form of patronage and therefore it was the hospital brothers who were responsible for electing Gerard's successor. The unwarranted interference of anyone, ecclesiastic or lay, was considered an abuse of power and would have been punished by the loss of any office, power and honour as well as excommunication. The same censure would have been incurred by anyone who violated the hospital's other rights established by the privilege. Finally, Paschal II decreed and confirmed that the hospital was responsible for six other hospitals and hospices, called *Ierosolymitani*, located in the western territories and mainly in Apulia.

Once again I want to recall that the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* sheds light on the origins of the Hospital of

St. John of Jerusalem. Reading the privilege we see that, at the time it was granted, the hospital founded by Gerard was already a well-known charitable institution, highly regarded also outside the Holy City. The brothers working in it were not members of a religious order, but performed their service under the leadership of the *prepositus* Gerard. It was a *fraternitas* of lay *hospitallarii*, dedicated to charitable works under the form of hospitality. To belong they did not have to have the status of a religious, albeit they were under the command of a superior. These hospitallers were semi-religious; as in other fraternities, they were subordinate to the *prepositus* Gerard, practised community life and poverty, very probably wore a habit, but had not taken vows.

Gerard had not asked the Pope to approve a new religious order, but only the autonomy of the hospital to protect its assets and to enable it to have its own oratory, as well as the permission to solicit alms in Jerusalem. On the other hand, Paschal's II benevolence and the Holy See's favour, rendered official in the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*, had initiated a metamorphosis for the hospital in Jerusalem with the establishment of a new religious order. As Andreas

Rehberg observes:

*“The papal privileges constituted the legal base for the existence and the autonomy of a religious order (...) These indispensable privileges concerned first of all papal protection, exemption from the jurisdiction of the bishops (which was not always total) and the taxes (tithes) due to the same bishops, the right to bury its dead as well as the authorization for collecting alms and the indulgences that served to attract donations in favour of the mother house and of its branches. Moreover, the exemption enabled the order to have their own cemeteries and oratories as well as ecclesiae and also applied to its branch houses”.*

Paschal II granted a good part of these privileges to the hospital with the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* while at the same time another two papal letters recommended the alms collectors for the hospital in Jerusalem to the bishops, abbots and nobles of Spain and Europe.

With these acts Paschal II not only acknowledged the situation and prestige of the hospital of St. John, but also created the conditions for its future expansion while making it part of the Holy See's strategy for redressing the balance of power within the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem.

## The religious metamorphosis

Following the crusaders' conquest of the Holy City, the pilgrims returned in such numbers that the new conquerors had to build up and extend the city's reception and hospitality facilities. This project was part of the Latinization process launched with the taking of Jerusalem at the end of the first crusade. Gerard's enterprising character was demonstrated during this process and he also earned the respect of the new governors because – as Roberto Greci claims – he seemed ideally suited to manage the changes:

*“he had been present in the Fatimid-Turkish context, when the existing monastic arrangement and the presence of the Greek church was guaranteed, and he was present in the new context of the crusades, when this heritage was gradually being surpassed. It was the personification of an exuberance independent of a specific pontifical plan, proceeding with its own momentum and with a great flexibility thanks to people who had gained concrete experience in a particularly fluid context”.*

Under Gerard's management the new hospital in Jerusalem increased in size and acquired such importance in the new ecclesiastic and political context that

it left the aegis of the monastery of St. Mary the Latin and established itself as an independent and functional body integrated into the local Church, the newly created Patriarchate of Jerusalem. After 1100, the hospital requested (and obtained) the Holy Sepulchre Chapter for the right to celebrate divine office in its own church of St. John, so it no longer needed to attend liturgies in Saint Mary the Latin.

The hospital's connection with the Holy Sepulchre Chapter lasted only for another ten years or so, that is until 1113 when Paschal II granted the *privilegium protectionis* with his *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*. In the meantime Baldwin ascended to the throne of Jerusalem, claiming himself king of the Latins, and the Holy Sepulchre Chapter found itself having to present "two candidates to the king, who had to choose the patriarch of the city" thus becoming the instrument for strengthening the royal power of the local Church. Faced with the risk of losing the independence achieved by leaving the Benedictine aegis, Gerard obtained from Paschal II the *privilegium protectionis Beati Petri*, protecting the hospital from any interference, both ecclesiastic and lay, and guaranteeing its autonomy. Moreover, the Pope's intervention –

as Greci observed – “*marked the hospital as entity that could help to remove from the royal monopoly places significant for all Christendom, an entity capable of encouraging interest in the holy sites, establishing itself as a collector of all donations addressed to the Holy Sepulchre. This implicitly meant weakening the canons’ chapter, involved in the relations with the patriarchate and with the royal power*”. The protection bestowed on the hospital helped to redress the balance between the Holy See and local powers in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem since the entities removed from the latter’s control consolidated the pope’s authority and influence. Despite this, the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* had not turned the hospital into a religious order, but had created the indispensable conditions for the evolution of the fraternity which, thanks to the benevolence and protection of the Apostolic See, could continue to operate in full autonomy and thus obtain more solidity and an enduring destiny within the ecclesiastical structure.

### **The Rule of the Order of St. John**

It should be recalled that the hospital’s *Precepta et statuta*, attributed to Gerard’s successor Raymond du

Puy was probably approved by Eugene III in 1153, that is forty years after the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*, and between 1184 and 1185 it was again confirmed by Lucius III. Despite the theory of an oral rule dictated by Gerard, these *Precepta et Statuta* were always considered as the hospital's "Rule", albeit their structure and content are not the same as those of a religious rule being more like regulations for in-house use. Notwithstanding, the Rule of the Order of St. John, together with the life experience of the hospitallers in Jerusalem, was a "*model for the subsequent hospitaller rules*". Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a burgeoning of various communities dedicated to hospitality, in response to the greater mobility of people and the increase in the pilgrim flows. A new spiritual spring was arriving, as André Vauchez explained:

*"around the year one thousand, when the laity started to have access to a more sentient religious life, [and they were attempting] to live like monks and follow their example. Instead of claiming a certain independence of temporal power, they showed an aspiration for asceticism and a very marked spiritualism that led the more demanding to the brink of*



*heresy. All this was as if the faithful had wanted to appropriate the religious ideal and the rules of monasticism to enjoy, in exchange, those graces and those compensations promised to those who had renounced earthly pleasures”.*

If we consider that almost all the hospitaller orders had their origin in minute local communities consisting of lay people voluntarily dedicated to hospitality and that few orders were members of canonical congregations, we can understand the doubts raised by historians about the adoption of a rule based on either the Benedictine or Augustinian one. This latter exercised a strong attraction from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards because of its adaptability to different situations and needs. However, it has not always been possible to define the choices made by the hospitaller orders.

For the hospital at Jerusalem, historians are still not clear about whether it was the Benedictine or Augustinian rule that was chosen. Some claim the former, considering the historic link with the monastery of St. Mary the Latin and the spiritual bond with the religious Benedictine family. Others instead prefer to see in Raymond du Puy's *Precepta et*

*Statuta* a strong influence of the Augustinian rule which the Patriarch of Jerusalem also imposed in 1114 on the Holy Sepulchre canons, who were thus transformed into canons regular.

I think that the Hierosolymitan hospitallers opted neither for the first rule, aimed at monks, nor the second, suited to canons. Without becoming confused with either they wanted to keep their hospitaller and lay identity intact, transformed into the condition of religious thanks to the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* and the subsequent precepts of the *Precepta et Statuta*, which demanded profession of the evangelical counsels for those who wanted to devote themselves to serving the poor in the hospital:

*In primis jubeo ut omnes fratres, ad servitium pauperum venientes tria, que promittunt Deo per manum Sacerdotis et per librum teneant cum Dei auxilio, scilicet: castitatem, et obedientiam, hoc est quodcumque precipitur eis a magistri suis, et sine proprio vivere; quia hec tria requireret Deus ab eis in ultimo certamine” (Precepta et Statuta, I, 1-2).*

It is no coincidence that the Order of St. John has always only considered the hospital’s “Rule” as Raymond du Puy’s *Precepta et Statuta* and as such

approved by Eugene III, Lucius III and Boniface VIII (April 7, 1300). This text also served as a model for the rules of other hospitaller orders. However, Paschal II's *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* represents the tangible sign of the Holy See's regard for the hospital at Jerusalem, enabling generous lay people to become religious while keeping their lay condition, as well devoting themselves to *servi pauperum*, "*quorum servos nos esse fatemur*" (*ibidem*, II, 2) exclusively under the pontifical authority.

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