

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

Journal of Spirituality

Ecclesial dimension of the Order of Malta



ROME 2007

N. 7

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Introduction

The Order of Malta is a Religious Order governed by the canonical regulations of the Church. Thus the title given to this edition of the Journals of Spirituality “Ecclesial Dimensions of the Order of Malta” could seem a tautology.

It was thought appropriate to highlight some aspects of the Order of Malta’s relationship with the Church to corroborate them and make members more aware of them. This is because, in their personal lives and in the activities they perform within the Order - especially charitable work - they need continually to be reminded of the implications implicit in this condition which in some way defines their identity and their actions.

The authors of the articles in this edition have thus attempted to emphasize the Order’s basic affiliation with the Church and its mission and the consequences thereto for all those who have chosen to become members of the Order of Malta.

The two articles on the American continent and that of a young Knight give an idea of the Church and its opening to the new generations that our Order is trying to reflect.

Angelo Acerbi

The Church and the Order of Malta: reflections and historical references

*“... to cultivate and continue the intimate relations
which unite as a holy bond
the Cross of Malta to the Pontifical Throne”.*
(Pius XII, 30 March 1941)

There are three adjectives which I think describe the above relationship, if one wants to attempt an extremely succinct, but meaningful, approach to the subject: *original*, *fundamental* and *constitutive*. These reflections are simply an attempt to illustrate these three definitions; they are documented with a series of citations at the end, besides the one at the beginning, from the speeches of some Supreme Pontiffs as an authoritative support to the scant and partial indications proposed here.

It seems obvious to me that this is not a univocal relation, but a bi-directional, reciprocal bond: the Church's consideration of the Order and the Order's consideration of the Church. Every intervention by one or the other implies an evaluation of reciprocity, that is it applies to both. Therefore, what is said from one viewpoint

(Church-Order), can – to some extent – be said for the reverse (Order-Church).

A very significant indication of the characteristics of this relationship (original, fundamental and constitutive) can be found in the annual meeting which for decades – nowadays a solid tradition – has taken place between the Holy Father and the Grand Master with the Sovereign Council during the celebration of the feast of St. John the Baptist. Naturally, this does not exclude other important events.

Original

It is natural to take as an initial reference that of the origins of our Order. I think it is now acknowledged that, as recent studies based on new documents show, the Order of St. John was founded against a background of three events in which the Church was – directly or indirectly – involved: the eleventh-century reform, the large-scale resumption of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and the important support and involvement of Benedictine monasticism.

Once independently established and assuming the hospitaller charisma of *Obsequium Pauperum*, it started to provide great assistance in Jerusalem and

in other places in Palestine and Europe. In acknowledgement of this, Pope Paschal II gave it the *Protection Beati Petri* on 5 February 1113 (*Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*), confirmed on 19 June 1119 by Pope Calistus II (*Ad Hoc Nos*) and by other Supreme Pontiffs throughout the 12th century.

This is not the place to discuss the legal – and also political – significance of these acts: we are only interested in citing them to document that original character we are attributing to the Church-Order relationship. If anything, we want to show that these acts indelibly mark the Order's existence and work, both in its internal life and in its relationships with a variety of other bodies.

To go into more depth, we can refer – as a repercussion – to the first Rule, attributed to Raymond du Puy, where there is no sign of dependence on local bishops. It was taken for granted that the St. John community refers only to papal authority besides that, obviously, of its legitimate superiors. A singular relationship which was also to cause local jurisdictional conflicts throughout its history, but which at the same time guaranteed the truly “Catholic” action of the Order and its prodigious expansion in the Christian world of the time.

However, the pontifical recognition is even more decisive: it frames the Order within consecrated religious life, distinguished by the classic vows of chastity and poverty, with the addition for the hospital Fratres that of “defending the insignia of Holy Religion up to the shedding of blood”. And we all know that the Cross of Christ is the insignia referred to. Still today the Order of St. John is distinguished by this specifically religious classification. A divine gift that the Church safeguards and guarantees for the universal community of the faithful and which the Order dutifully accepts when it asserts the need for its members to read and meditate on the documents of the Magisterium.

Fundamental

This adjective refers precisely to the foundations of a building: they are not seen, and yet they always and inexorably guarantee the stability of the entire building, so that even if something collapses the foundations remain and one can rebuild on them. This simple observation means that the Order, in its religious essence, has as its foundation the Catholic Church in the person of its Supreme Shepherd. This has been true since its

origins, and especially since 1113, constituting the essential element of its being and its work.

The profession of the Faith according to the Roman Catholic tradition is an indispensable condition for the Order. This clearly emerges from the first four articles of its Constitutional Charter which – apart from the legal language – basically constitutes the first Rule of religious life for all the Order's members, albeit varying according to the pledge made (Professed, in Obedience, other Members). I think it therefore appropriate to cite from the first paragraph of article 2 of our Constitutional Charter: "The purpose of the Order is the promotion of the glory of God through the sanctification of its members, service to the faith, and to the Holy Father and assistance to one's neighbour, in accordance with its ancient traditions. I will just add a quote from paragraph 2: "...guided by the teaching of the Church..." The pledge of spiritual choice is clear and without any possibility of misinterpretation on either a personal or community level for all Confrères.

In almost all the Popes' speeches to the Order during the 20th century there is a heartfelt and fundamental affirmation of its essence as an

authentic religious Order and of its charismatic mission.

Constitutive

I shall start with a small historic reference external to the Order. During the years immediately before the suppression of the Jesuits (1773), some projects for reforming the Society were submitted to Pope Clement XIV, to guarantee its survival. He always and steadfastly replied: “sint ut sunt, aut non sint”. And would not accept any compromise. I think I can venture to say that Pope Ganganelli’s affirmation also relates to our Order’s situation. The speeches of the Supreme Pontiffs – some of which certainly very pondered (there is no need to give examples) – must be read and interpreted in the light of this radicality: either it is a religious Order *strictu sensu* or it does not exist any longer with the characteristics which have defined it, made it famous and also distinguished by numerous Saints and Blessed over its nine centuries of history.

In brief, any distortion of its religious essence constitutes a betrayal of its history and, what is more important, of the original constitutive element of the Order of St. John. And any reform – necessary to meet the needs of changing times –

must be “organic”. St. Vincent cites this adjective in his first *Commonitorium*: “True progress comes through internal development. Change instead occurs when one doctrine is turned into another”. And he gives an example by referring to human growth to conclude that: “this is the true and authentic law of organic progress. This is the marvelous order that nature has given to every growth. In old age one uses and develops in increasingly ample forms everything that the wisdom of the Creator had previously shaped in the child”.

It is true that the religious Order consists of the consecrated laity, but this certainly does not mean that the Order, by updating itself, becomes secular, as if wanting to be like other political institutions to respond to “power” interests which have nothing to do with our Order’s vocation, mission and original structure. Any attempt at “updating” that does not consider religious life as the basic core and *raison d’être* of the Order is a discreditable misrepresentation of its essence. Let it be clear that all can exist and have citizenship within it, but only if clearly serviceable to the charisma that God consigned to it and to its constitutive and structural nature as a religious Order.

Here are just a few of the many pontifical citations I mentioned earlier:

"Also when they unsheathed their swords, they recalled that they were true religious and, as such, first of all disciples of the God of love and charity"

(Pius XII, 15 January 1940).

"We have... particular concern for those Institutions which, in the observance of the obligations of religious life, fight under the banner of the Divine Saviour, and we willingly support their greater development, so that the Church and the human family shall reap great benefits from it"

(Pius XII, Breve of 21 November 1956).

"The Order requires a religious and lay commitment, it has a knightly and military tradition, and today is totally dedicated to the service of the sick and poor"

(John Paul II, 26 March 1983).

"And also, one could add, a religious spirit in that a certain number of knights take vows or promises similar to monastic vows, as a consequence of which prayer, a life of faith and the spirit of the beatitudes must for everyone go hand in hand with charity"

(Idem).

"Therefore, at your origins, the renewal of religious life came in the wake of the birth and development of the great contemplative Orders together with that original form of religious Order that is called "Knighthly"

(John Paul II, 26 June 1984).

"... please witness the concern of this Apostolic See which, besides the diplomatic link it has with your Sovereign Order, wants to be close to you, in your journey towards perfection, also with a pastoral presence"

(Idem).

"Encouraging the many commitments of charity that you have, I hope that in these the glory of the Cross glows fully. In this way it will show again your fidelity to the Church, imbued with the presence of Christ and reflecting His face to the world "

(John Paul II, 4 June 1988).

"The Holy See... has profound links with the Order which date back to the beginning of the second millennium, when it was founded in Jerusalem as the Hospitaller Order of St John"

(John Paul II, 13 October 1997).

"For over nine centuries, your praiseworthy order has always been characterized by a special bond with the

See of Peter. My Predecessor Leo XIII recalled this in his Apostolic Letter Solemne semper by which he re-established the Grand Mastership of the Order of Malta in 1879."

(John Paul II, 12 January 2001).

"The Holy See appreciates the many services it renders to the cause of evangelization and, in particular, the numerous beneficial initiatives that it constantly promotes for the needy....I encourage you to persevere with generosity on your journey of fidelity to Christ and to his Church "

(John Paul II, 22 June 2004).

Fra' Giovanni Scarabell

The Order of Malta, religious Order governed by canonical regulations – The First Class –

The specific task of the Church, whether universal or particular, is that of mediating always and everywhere the proclamation of salvation, that is God's invitation to receive his Word and to live it: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son". (Heb. 1,1). Receiving and living the Word of God liberates us from the slavery of sin and death and gives us the Grace to live as children of God.

The particular communities have always been instruments of salvation in the Church, with their different aims, tasks and means, defined in writing and approved by the competent ecclesiastical authorities (Code, Statutes, Rules, etc.). These extensive collections of regulations are often summed up in a short motto (Ora et labora, Pax et bonum, etc.) expressing the charisma of the particular religious tradition, making it familiar and memorable.

But over and beyond these particular regulations, the principle that unites each different

tradition in the Church is the love of Christ, that is the manifestation of the infinite love that is given for our eternal salvation.

The Code of Canon Law (=CCL) deals with institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life “Liber II :De populo Dei, Pars III :De institutis vitae consecratae et de societatibus vitae apostolicae”. In Pars III, Sectio I deals specifically with institutes of consecrated life and is thus pertinent to our theme.

“Can. 573,1. The life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to His honour, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory.”

“Can. 573,2. The Christian faithful freely assume this form of living in institutes of consecrated life canonically erected by competent authority of the Church. Through vows or other

sacred bonds according to the proper laws of the institutes, they profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience and, through the charity to which the counsels lead, are joined in a special way to the Church and its mystery.”

Some articles of the Constitutional Charter (=CC) and the Code (=C) of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (=Order; = Knights of St. John) which for reasons of space cannot be cited in full, are copied, sometimes word by word, from these and other rules of the CCL.

In the CC, “ Title I: The Order and its Nature, Art. 1: Origin and Nature of the Order” Par. 1 — The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta, arose from a group of hospitallers of the Hospice of Saint John of Jerusalem who had been called upon by circumstances to augment their original charitable enterprise with military service for the defence of pilgrims to the Holy Land and of Christian civilization in the East. It is a lay religious Order, by tradition military, chivalrous and nobiliary, which in time became sovereign on the islands of Rhodes and later of Malta.”

“Art. 2: Purpose, Par. 1 — The purpose of the Order is the promotion of the glory of God

through the sanctification of its members, service to the faith and to the Holy Father, and assistance to one's neighbour, in accordance with its ancient traditions. Par. 2 — True to the divine precepts and to the admonitions of our Lord Jesus Christ, guided by the teachings of the Church, the Order affirms and propagates the Christian virtues of charity and brotherhood. The Order carries out its charitable works for the sick, the needy and refugees without distinction of religion, race, origin and age. The Order fulfils its institutional tasks especially by carrying out hospitaller works, including social and health assistance, as well as aiding victims of exceptional disasters and of war, attending also to their spiritual well-being and the strengthening of their faith in God.”

In “Title II: The Members of the Order, Art. 8: The Classes, Par. 1 — The members of the Order are divided into three classes: A) the First Class consists of Knights of Justice, also called Professed, and of Professed Conventual Chaplains who have made religious vows; the same Article 8, under B) states that “ the Second Class consists of members in Obedience, who make the Promise; and under C) the “Third Class consists of those members who do not make religious vows or the Promise but

who live according to the norms of the Church and are prepared to commit themselves to the Order and the Church...”.

We are mostly interested in members of the first class. Art. 9 of the same Title II lists the “Obligations of the Members”: Par. 1 — The Knights and Chaplains belonging to the First Class profess the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in accordance with the Code, thus aspiring to perfection according to the Gospel. They are religious for all purposes of Canon Law....”

The Order claims to be lay religious, and in this regard we refer to the CCL, Liber I cited above:

“Can. 588, Par. 1: By its very nature, the state of consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay. Par 2: That institute is called clerical which, by reason of the purpose or design intended by the founder or by virtue of legitimate tradition, is under the direction of clerics, assumes the exercise of sacred orders, and is recognized as such by the authority of the Church. Par. 3: That institute is called lay which, recognized as such by the authority of the Church, has by virtue of its nature, character, and purpose a proper function defined by the founder or by legitimate tradition, which does not include the exercise of sacred orders.”

The status of “cleric” is defined in the CCL in “Liber II, Pars I: De Christifidelibus”, “Can. 266, Par. 1: Through the reception of the diaconate, a person becomes a cleric.....” The Knights of Justice are not clerics, and although there was a Knight of Justice deacon in the last century, I think it was an exception not destined to be repeated.

The Order also gives priests the possibility of belonging to the first class, that is of becoming Professed Conventual Chaplains, as in Articles 8-9 of the CC, in 50 - 60, 160 - 162 of the Order’s C and in various other articles. This is in line with the Church’s general law and with its traditions. The Hospitaller Order of St. John of God, under the heading “Purpose” indicates: “Corporal and spiritual assistance to the sick. Lay order with the right to have the priests necessary for the spiritual assistance of the sick and of their communities”. (Pontifical Yearbook 2006).

Nothing is said about the number of Professed Conventual Chaplains or their ratio with regards to the lay religious or Knights of Justice. It has always been traditional for the Order to possess few of these Chaplains and this custom is still preserved.

The religious formation of Knights and Chaplains and the Profession of Temporary and

Perpetual Vows is established by the C at Art. 6-47 and 50-57 of “Title II, The Members of the First Class” and faithfully follows that established by the CCL, again in “ Liber II, Capitulus III: De candidatorum admissione et de sodalium institutione”, can. 641-661. Both the CCL and the Order’s C contain very important pages because they establish a solid and clear base for the spiritual life of a “religious” in his journey towards holiness for the glory of God, in the service of the Faith and of the Holy Father, and in fidelity to the charisma of the religious, in our case of the Knights of St. John.

For novices and their formation, the Order takes the formal aspects of the Church’s teaching: aspirancy, novitiate, years of Simple, Public and Permanent Vows, master of novitiate, spiritual father. The master has the same tasks and responsibilities as the novice masters of other religious orders. But he also has the particularly difficult task of enabling the Order’s religious to live, not in a monastery but in their normal environment. The Order’s CC at Art. 9 states: Obligations of the Members, Par. 1: The Knights and Chaplains belong to the First ClassThey are not obliged to live in community”. In fact, the Professed Knight almost never lives permanently with other Professed

(monastic life), and this gives the master a specific formative commitment.

Art. 20 of the C specifies that the novice master has an assistant, a Knight of Justice or, or if unavailable, a Knight of Obedience who guides the novice in the knowledge of the Order, its history and so on, and edifies him with the actual example of his consecrated life. The assistant is a characteristic figure in the Order.

The Order follows the fundamental aspects of the CCL for this important moment, decisive for the spiritual formation of a consecrated life and for the apostolate. The master and his assistant must form the novice's soul in profound spirituality, transmitting to him the sincere desire to live according to the Order's ideals, determined to work with humility in the service of the poor and the sick, happy to perform the humblest tasks.

For this formative task, which must continue throughout life following the path of Faith and charitable works, teachers and novices must always bear in mind the articles of the C regarding Professed Knights in Perpetual Vows, trying to be equal to the duties and responsibilities which they must freely assume with the religious profession to

“strive towards religious perfection” and to give oneself more and more to God.

“Art. 85: Duties of the Professed. The Professed, mindful of their high vocation and of the obligations they have freely assumed before the Church and the Order, must conform their lives to the spirit of the Gospel, according to the Constitution and the Code, and strive towards religious perfection.”

“Art. 86: Religious Practices of the Professed. The Professed must fulfil diligently the common duties of the Christian life and, unless legitimately impeded:

- a) dedicate at least one hour a day to pious practices;
- b) frequent assiduously Holy Communion and the sacrament of penance according to the advice of their Spiritual Directors;
- c) take part each year in a course of spiritual exercises of at least five full days in a religious house.”

The interior life of the Knight of St. John is guided by the norms of the CCL, CC and C, the solid work of the spiritual guides - novice master, spiritual father, Knight of Justice in charge of the novice's formation (assistant) - and later on by the Perpetual Vows, besides the written norms, the spiritual guidelines that the Superiors give to the Professed for

nourishing and increasing their fidelity and fervour. The aim is to make the Knight a man of God and of the Church, following the programme that every religious order tries to implement for the holiness of its fraternity.

Another law of the Church demonstrates that the order of St. John of Jerusalem is an authentic religious order: the Knight of Justice's perpetual vow of chastity means he cannot contract marriage. This fact is characteristic of religious orders that are legally recognised as such by the ecclesiastic authority.

The CCL, "Liber VI: De Ecclesiae munere sacrificandi, Pars I: De Sacramentis, Titulus VII: De Matrimonio". "Can. 1073: A diriment impediment renders a person unqualified to contract marriage validly". "Can. 1088: Those bound by a public perpetual vow of chastity in a religious institute invalidly attempt marriage".

The Order's C at Title II: The Members of the First Class, Chapter II: Religious Vows", "Art. 67, Par.2: The temporary vow of chastity constitutes an impedient impediment (marriage is unlawful but valid) and the perpetual vow of chastity constitutes a diriment impediment (it makes marriage unlawful) to contracting marriage.

The Charisma

Like any other religious Order, the Order of St. John has also expressed in its regulations, and in particular in its fundamental choices, the “*proprium*, the charisma” of its long life and of its ministry in the Church and in the world: “*Tuitio fidei, Obsequium pauperum*”. Albeit for many centuries its initial purpose of serving the sick (Lord Jesus sick) was flanked by military activities and for a long time it seemed that the armed defence of the Faith would become more important than the Order’s essentially charitable aims, it never replaced them. The Order always preserved the spirit and works of a hospitaller institution (Papal Bulls and official documents define the Order simply as: “the Hospital”). For every religious order, the strong awareness of belonging to the Church and to its regulations, of participating in its mission of salvation, is well expressed by ancient but always relevant Latin phrases: “*sensus fidei, sentire cum Ecclesia, vivere in Ecclesia Dei, in Ecclesia Petri*”. As said before, various articles of the Order’s CC and C assert that its purpose is the sanctification of its members, in the service of the Faith and of the Holy Father, and

emphasize the great values of holiness deriving from the Catholic asceticism, through prayer and charitable works in hospitals, alongside the sick, during natural disasters, for all kinds of poverty and in interventions in epidemics and wars. The assertions in the CC and C are not just formal, but something that the Order experiences every day, true to its charisma. In this way it imitates the best of its members, despite the many deficiencies and fragilities present in all human conditions and in every person. It is significant that a Missal for Celebrations of the Order's Saints and Blessed was brought out some years ago. This Missal has now been republished to insert some Confrères who were canonized by Pope John Paul II.

The Order is now reliving its earliest times and, as someone who has known it for over thirty years, I can sense a continual growth of spiritual life in all the classes, in every age, in the Knights and Dames and in the time devoted to liturgical and personal prayer. In the Order's Guides there is a desire to increase charitable actions with more frequent initiatives to serve God according to the Gospel, that is to serve Our Lords the Sick.

Like other religious orders, the Order of St. John has a strong sense of belonging to the Church

and to its regulations and of participating in its mission of salvation. And everything written here bears witness to this.

However, the definitive proof that the Order has the prerogative to be a religious order in a legal sense is given by the approval of the competent ecclesiastical authority. I therefore refer to that written in this edition of the “Journals of Spirituality” by frà Giovanni Scarabelli.

Msgr. Dr. Fra ‘Antonio Lotti

Some guidelines for the Second and Third Classes

*Sentire cum Ecclesia*¹ means participating actively in the *life* and *teaching* of the universal and local Church.

The Order of St. John of Jerusalem reflects the universal People of God, in conformity with its nature and with the gifts of the Holy Spirit that animate it.

“Those who request, or are invited to enter the Order in one of the categories of the Third Class must be aware that, according to the *Constitutional Charter* (art. 1, 1 and art. 8 and 9), although they are not strictly speaking religious (like the Professed Knights), and are not bound by a special religious promise (like the Knights of Obedience), they yet become member of a *religious order*” (ReC, p. 11, n. 1) whose life and identity

* The following abbreviations are used in this paper: AA (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, 1965), LG (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964), CL (*Christifideles laici*, 1988), CC (*Constitutional Charter*, Rome 1997), ReC (*Regulations and Commentary*, Rome 1969).

¹ Several Fathers of the Church have adopted the expression “*Sentire cum Ecclesia* in various versions (cf. for example *Patrologia Latina*, 104, 86 a-b) as has St. Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*, nn. 352-370. Many official documents of the Magisterium have often used it

are based on the mystery of the Church and on its *specific charisma*.²

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

The Church is mystery because it reflects the mystery of God-Trinity; man is also mystery and only in Christ, in the mystery of the Word made flesh, can he be fully known in his being and in his becoming, in life and death, in nature and in grace.

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, referring to the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, stresses the mystery of the church-communion.³

The communion of Christians with Christ has the communion of God with the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit as its model, source and means; they are all branches of the true vine that is Christ (Jn 15, 1-5).

² The Special Chapter General of 1969 (ReC, p. 33) cites the decree *Perfectae caritatis* (2, b): "It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions-all of which make up the patrimony of each institute-be faithfully held in honor."

³ CL, 18-20; see also LG, 1-17. The discourse on the mystery of the Church is taken from the two documents cited here.

This communion is the mystery of the Church and “at the Second Vatican Council the Church again proposed this central idea about herself” (CL, 19).

The same Council, retracing the entire history of salvation, proposes the image of the Church as the *People of God*: “God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as *one people*, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.” (LG, 9).

In its very first lines, the constitution *Lumen Gentium* admirably sums up this doctrine by writing that: “... the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG, 1).

The ecclesial communion is likened to an “organic” communion, similar to that of a living and functioning body: In fact, at one and the same time it is characterised by a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations and states of life, of ministries, of charisms and of responsibilities.

Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen *in relation to the*

whole body, and offers *a totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body.

1. *Charisms in the People of God*

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the people of God, but “*He gives them to each one, just as He determines*” (1 Cor 12, 11), distributing special graces among the faithful of every rank. He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle Paul “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*” (1 Cor 12, 7).

These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the new needs emerging in the Church (LG, 12; CL, 21-24).

“It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious institutes” (LG, 44).

The members of every class of the Order of St. John are required to have a *profound sense of the mystery* that arouses the adoration of God, the veneration of humans and of all creatures. The sense of mystery is

one of the most intimate aspects of Christian eternal humanism and spiritual life, because man surpasses man and because God surpasses all our expectations and knowledge.

The Church, and in it our Order, has evolved according to the law of uniform development formulated in the 5th century by Vincenzo di Lérins in his *Commonitorium*. The saint asks himself the question: “Will there ever be any progress in the religion of the Church of Christ?” and replies: “There is no doubt that there will be and it will also be very great”.⁴

Down the centuries, the Order of St. John has been required to possess a *twofold fidelity*:

- *the fidelity to the Church* in its basic components so well summed up by the Acts of the Apostles: “And they devoted themselves to the *apostles' teaching and fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and the *prayers*” (2, 42), by tradition and by the Magisterium;
- *the fidelity to the Order's charisma* according to the needs of the times and using the most appropriate methods: “through the centuries we

⁴ “*Habeatur plane et maximus*” V. DI LÉRINS, *Commonitorium*, c. 23, in *Patrologia Latina*, 50, 667.

have fought with the weapons that were at the time most adequate. At present we use the most modern scientific means to help the sick as well as those who are in danger, and especially where the danger is greatest [...] Let us take care of our friends and of our enemies, bearing witness to Christ wherever we happen to be. [...] Whatever we do.....must be subordinate to the aims of those great and ancient, but always present, traditions: the *care of the sick*, the *assistance to the poor* [*obsequium pauperum*] and the *apostolate among those who are away from Christ* [*tuitio fidei*]" (ReC, p. 23).

Here is the interpretation that the Special Chapter General of 1969 proposes for the first part of the Order's motto "*Tuitio fidei*": the *apostolate among those who are away from Christ* both in their own environment and in "certain parts of society" (ReC, p. 24).

2. *Mission of the laity in the Church*

The Church, in its development, has gradually specified the particular position of the laity within it and *sentire cum Ecclesia* means that the Order has to participate in this *sentire* with regards to the mission of the laity.

The laity, for whom it has been written that the Word of God can only fructify thirty percent⁵, listened to the words of Vatican Council II with great joy and renewed commitment: “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity”. In addition to these words, the Council considers the fruitful benefits to society: “*by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society.*” (LG, 40).

The constitution *Lumen gentium* devotes the entire Chapter IV to the laity in the Church: “*What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature [...] But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.*” (LG, 31).

⁵ AA. VV., *Laicità*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1977, p. 88.

3. *Universal call to holiness*

The constitution *Lumen Gentium* devotes the entire Chapter V to the “The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church”, and for its part the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* refers to the “significant words” of the Council on this theme, claiming that “*it is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church by a Council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the gospel*” (CL, 16-17).

This charge is not to be understood only as a *moral exhortation* but more profoundly as an undeniable requirement arising from the *mystery* of the Church.

Twenty years after the conclusion of the Council the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 emphatically stressed that, since the Church of Christ is mystery, it must be the sign and means of holiness. The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments of the Church’s history: “Today we have a very great need of saints, who have to implore God assiduously”.⁶

⁶ *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 9, 1791.

The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one - that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity. (LG, 41; CL, 55-56).

These teachings of the Council are explicitly reiterated and commentated for the members of the Second and Third Classes by the *Regulations and Commentary* (pp. 20-22), which describe how the “striving for perfection” of charity must be understood by each of the Order’s classes.

4. *Compassion for the poor and the sick*

The council decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* on the apostolate of the laity offers food for thought and great encouragement for action for all our Order’s members.

While every exercise of the apostolate should be motivated by charity, some works by their very nature can become especially vivid expressions of this charity. Christ the Lord wanted these works to be signs of His messianic mission (Mt 11:4-5).

The greatest commandment in the law is to love God with one's whole heart and one's neighbour as oneself (Mt 22:37-40).

Christ made this commandment of love of one's neighbour His own and enriched it with a new meaning. For He wanted to equate Himself with His brethren as the object of this love when He said, "*As long as you did it for one of these, the least of My brethren, you did it for Me*" (Mt 25:40). He established charity as the mark of His disciples, saying, "*By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (Jn 13,35).

"The holy Church, in every era, is recognized by this sign of love, and while it rejoices in the undertakings of others, it claims works of charity as its own inalienable duty and right. For this reason, pity for the needy and the sick and works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind are held in highest honor by the Church [...].

Therefore, *the laity* should hold in high esteem and, according to their ability, aid the *works of charity and projects for social assistance, whether public or private, including international programmes* whereby effective help is given to needy individuals and peoples. In so doing,

they should cooperate with all men of good will. (AA, 8; CL, 41 and 53).

THE CHARISMA OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM

The Order of St. John is a lay religious (CC, 1, 1) and *sui generis* order (ReC, p. 23). It is a religious Order in that some of its members profess the evangelic counsels and “are ordained to the honour and service of God under a new and special title”. Indeed through Baptism every Christian person is consecrated to God. However, “*in order that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace,*” (LG, 44), the Christian can choose to participate in the spiritual tradition of a religious order and choose the most suitable ranks and forms of membership for him so that “*this consecration will be the more perfect, in as much as the indissoluble bond of the union of Christ and His bride, the Church, is represented by firm and more stable bonds* (LG, 44).

There are three forms and ranks of membership in our Order: the *profession* in the First Class, the *promise* in the Second Class and *the commitment* in the Third Class.

The *Regulations and Commentary* have specified that the “the bond established by the *Promise* [in the Second

Class] is stronger than the promise of the Tertiaries or Oblates” (ReC, p. 20).

The *Commitment* in the Third Class is then equivalent to that of the Tertiaries or Oblates.⁷

1. *Religious order*

The *Constitutional Charter* (art. 9, 3) explicitly lays down that “*the members of the Order are to conduct their lives in conformity with the teaching and precepts of the Church*”.

The *Regulations and Commentary* illustrate the indications of the *Constitutional Charter* for members of the *Third Class*:

- a) They should do their best to come to a proper knowledge of the Holy Bible and the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. They should affirm their loyalty to the Holy Father and adapt

⁷ The statute and the name of Tertiaries and Oblates has been profoundly changed for many religious order, both with reference to the documents of the Vatican Council II and to the new Code of Canon Law of 1983. Some orders have adopted the notion of “family” for the different forms of membership: *Monastic family*, *Franciscan family*, *Dominican family*. The Carmelites use the expression secular Carmelites to describe the lay persons belonging to their order. For more information consult M. DORTEL-CLAUDOT, S. J., *Les Laïcs associés. Participation de laïcs au charisme d'un Institut Religieux*, Paris 2001.

their personal lives to the precepts of the Church. They should profess, with all possible charity and humility, sentiments of noble and chivalrous generosity (p. 11).

- b) By adapting their lives to the principles of the Church, they should serve as an example to their families and surroundings. Such an attitude shall be dictated by the application of the advice given in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (p. 11).
- c) By acknowledging that all wealth is a gift of God, they should use their possessions “*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*” and for the benefit of their fellow man (p. 11).
- d) By observing Sundays and Holy Days, and regularly partaking of the Sacraments, they shall unite their prayers with those of their confrères for the good and for the intentions of the Order (p. 12).

The *Regulations and Commentary* also illustrate the indications of the *Constitutional Charter* for members of the Second Class:

- a) In order to observe the divine law and the precepts of the Church, the Knight and [and the Dame] of Obedience shall devote himself to humble reading of the Holy Scriptures, of the

Sacred Texts, and of the acts of the Magisterium of the Church and particularly of the documents of the Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (p. 24).

- b) In manifesting his devotion to the Church, the Knight [and the Dame] of Obedience must try to understand what the Church expects from him. He will not indulge in empty or presumptuous criticism, but will submit his will in accord with that of *sentire cum Ecclesia*, conforming himself to the Magisterium (p. 24).
- c) For the work of the apostolate – the *tuitio fidei* – which represents a true and unique aim of the Order, the Knight [and the Dame] of Obedience shall consult the texts of the Council Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity in order to meditate on the teaching of the Church, for the direction of his activities. He who intends to fulfil a work of apostolate consonant with the dignity of the Order must continuously and efficiently nourish his religious knowledge, so that the Spirit of the Lord may actively operate in him (pp. 25-26).

2. *Hospitaller order*

With explicit reference to the teachings of the Council and to the Church's teaching about compassion for the poor and the sick briefly cited above, the Special Chapter General of 1969 naturally also refers to the Order's hospitaller activities:

- a) The members of the Second Class cannot separate the duties of the apostolate from those regarding assistance to the sick and poor, as it is their duty to fight not only disease and misery, but also religious ignorance and error. The Special Chapter of 1969 refers to the Council Decree on Ecumenism "Unitatis Redintegratio" and the declaration of the same Council on Religious Freedom "Dignitatis Humanae" (ReC, p. 24).
- b) As members of a religious order, those who are received in the Third Class must feel they are members of a Hospitaller Order. In fact, as the text of the Constitutional Charter (art. 9, 3) asserts, they share with the members of the First and Second Class the duty to "devote their energies to the service of the Order and, in particular, to the hospitaller and social service, according to that specified in the Code" (ReC, p. 12).

SOME GUIDELINES

1. *Participation in the life of the local Church*

The Order's spiritual, apostolic and charitable life assumes participation in the life of the local, diocesan and parish church, as already happens with many of its bodies.

The Order's members participate in the Sunday liturgy or other celebrations in their own parish or in other churches, but its bodies (Grand Pories, Sub-Pories, Associations, Delegations, ...) should set up, each at their own level, *continuous relationships*, through *their own representative*, with the local church. They do this either by regularly participating in the diocesan committees for health pastoral care and for pilgrimages or in any other committees or organizations that have to do with the Order's life and charisma.

The Order's *ecclesial visibility* should also be taken into consideration by participating, for example, in celebrations in the cathedral during Holy Week or other solemnities of the diocese, participating in processions, pilgrimages or other particularly significant ceremonies for the individual dioceses.

2. *Initial and continuing formation*

Formation is not to be seen only as acquiring historical, legal, doctrinal and spiritual knowledge of the Order, but as a real experience of participating in its life: “*Come and see*” (Jn, 1, 39).

The initial formation for the *Third Class* involves a gradual insertion of applicants in the Order’s spiritual and hospitaller life and also includes formative meetings to learn about the Order’s history and present activities.

The initial formation for the *Second Class* is covered by the *Code* (art. 97) and must involve the candidate’s advancement in both formation and in commitment.

Special attention must be paid to the formation for the Order’s *Youth Groups*.

Special moments during the formation are the annual retreats, the pilgrimages and the monthly or more frequent meetings.

Formation, initial and continuing, in *sensu cum Ecclesia* assumes that the Order’s bodies actively participate in the life of the local, diocesan and parish Church.

Useful indications can be found in the exhortation *Christifideles Laici* which devotes Chapter V (57-63) to

formation, with particular attention to spiritual formation, to doctrinal formation, to the Church's social doctrine and to the places and means of formation.

For a formation in *sentire cum Ecclesia* the following could be useful:

- the constitution *Lumen gentium*, and especially Chapter IV devoted to *The Laity* and Chapter V devoted to *The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church*
- the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*
- the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*
- the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* of Pope John Paul II
- the encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* of Pope Benedict XVI (especially the second part devoted to the Church's charitable activity, 9-29, and the multiple structures of charitable service in today's social context, 30-39).

“The Chaplains must help the Knights and Dames to deepen and live the charisma of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and to reconcile its traditions with the needs of the times and the situations in which they act, so that their work is always at the service of the Church of God, for the salvation of souls” (ReC, p. 4).

The Professed Knights and Knights and Dames in Obedience, because they have greater responsibilities in the Order, can assist the Chaplains in initial and continuing formation.

For formation in the *Order's specific charisma* the following could be useful:

- the *Constitutional Charter and Code*
- the *Regulations and Commentary* of the Special Chapter General of 1969
- the rites of the Profession in the First Class, of the *Promise* in the Second Class and of the *Investiture* in the Third Class
- the *Directions for Life for members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta*
- the *Seminar for the Order of Malta's Strategies. 28 January-2 February 2004. Final reports of the working groups*

I shall conclude this contribution with the closing words of the Special Chapter of 1969:

“Thus, fortified in the faith and fired with love, the members of the Order of Malta will fervently participate, in the spirit of their glorious traditions, in the lay apostolate desired by the Church” (p. 48).

Fr. Costantino G. Gilardi

“Sentire cum ecclesia”: an essential premise to “Tuitio Fidei”

The Knights and Dames of the Sovereign Order of Malta have a twofold commitment as their particular "charisma": that of defending the Catholic faith "Defensio Fidei", and that of serving the poor and the sick, "Obsequium Pauperum". Since the Order is known as the “Hospitaller Order” and since its origins are in the foundation and running of a hospital in Jerusalem, the emphasis is often on its work for the poor and sick rather than its “Tuitio Fidei”.

“Tuitio Fidei”: a fundamental commitment

The Order's first institutional aim is this commitment, which must never be overshadowed or seen as secondary. The Knights of St. John were so committed to defending the Christian faith and fidelity to the Church of Rome that many of them did not hesitate to sacrifice their life for it. The Knights are no longer asked to defend the faith with a sword but rather with words, with their example and witness in their lives.

"Tuitio Fidei" is thus not an option, but a fundamental commitment, and is one of the reasons for which the Order of Malta, although by its nature made up of the "laity", is a "religious" Order and as such plays a specific role in the Church. It feels that it forms part of the Church's life – albeit maintaining its own nature as a sovereign Order – in harmony with what the Church teaches, "sentire cum Ecclesia", and defending the truth of the faith in which the Church believes.

Defence of the faith today

To be more realistic and explicit, "Tuitio Fidei" often involves the courage to go "against the tide", to support the positions of the ecclesiastical Magisterium on, for example, the sanctity of human life from its conception to the grave, on the institution of the family, rooted in the order established by the Creator and consisting of matrimony between man and woman, and on the issues of bioethics and scientific research on humans.

In our western world it is fashionable to believe in relativism and secularization, where God is increasingly disappearing from the public conscience; in which the human person and the role

of Christ in the God's plan for our salvation is waning, and in which the values shaped by the Church's bimillenary tradition are progressively losing their effectiveness. For the individual person, faith is also becoming increasingly difficult, and life projects – as well as lifestyles – are determined according to personal taste or judgement.

Ours is not a religion which, between truth of faith or rules to follow, allows one to choose what most suits or pleases us: we have no choice if we want to be "in the Church" and "for the Church"! We have to accept all the truths that she asks us to believe, and comply with the rules that she dictates, albeit always respecting our freedom to comply with them or not.

"Every Christian," said Benedict XVI in Warsaw during his visit to Poland in May, "is bound to confront his own convictions continually with the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church's Tradition in the effort to remain faithful to the word of Christ, even when it is demanding and, humanly speaking, hard to understand.... We must not yield to the temptation of relativism or of a subjectivist and selective interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Only the whole truth can open us to adherence to Christ, dead and risen for our salvation".

To have in order to give

Naturally, to be able to defend their Faith, the Knights and Dames need to be instructed, to be “educated in the faith”. To do this, each must ask for counsel from his or her Chaplain, attend catechism courses, read books illustrating the Catholic doctrine and meet in small groups, under the guidance of experts in theology and Holy Scripture, to practice “lectio divina”. Many dioceses have “Higher Institutes of Religious Science”: why not join them and try to attend them? Often the meetings in these institutes are held in the evening and are open to all.

Two books, in particular, should belong to the personal library of a Knight and Dame other than, naturally the Bible. These are the “Catechism of the Catholic Church”, or its Compendium (a slim volume of 180 pages, written in dialogue form), and the “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church”. There is much to learn from these two books!

Benedict XVI, in his homily during the Mass of 7 January 2007, speaking to the parents and godparents of the newly-baptised infants, stated that: “the attentive study of the Catechism of the Catholic

Church or of the Compendium of this Catechism can offer you important help. It contains the essential elements of our faith and can be a particularly useful and immediate means, for you yourselves, to grow in the knowledge of the Catholic faith and to transmit it integrally and faithfully to your children. Above all, do not forget that it is your witness, it is your example, that has the greatest effect on the human and spiritual maturation of your children's freedom ". Speaking to these parents, the Pope was also speaking to you, Knight and Dames of the Order of Malta!

On his part, John Paul II, on the publication of the Catechism on 11 October 1992, wrote: "in reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church we can perceive the wondrous unity of the mystery of God, his saving will, as well as the central place of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, sent by the Father, made man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be our Saviour. Having died and risen, Christ is always present in his Church, especially in the sacraments; he is the source of our faith, the model of Christian conduct and the Teacher of our prayer".

Card. Pio Laghi, Cardinalis Patronus

“Obsequium Pauperum” and the Encyclical ‘Deus Caritas Est’

The Order of Malta was born as a charitable body under the auspices of the Benedictine monastery of S.Maria dei Latini, as a hospice for pilgrims to treat the poor and the sick. The Order's ancient memories carry the echo of the intense life of charity that reigned within it and that aroused visitors' admiration. The emperor Frederick I, Barbarossa, returning home from the Holy Land where he had taken part in the second Crusade, “afterwards repeatedly recalled with emotion that he had seen with his very eyes the many charitable works that were carried out every day in the hospital of the Holy City thanks to the efforts of the Knights of St. John”. (*F.Cardini, il Barbarossa, p.112- Mondadori 2006*).

With the Bull of Paschal II, the hospital community which grew up around the Blessed Gerard soon received the recognition of the supreme authority of the Church. The first article in this Journal illustrates the link between the Catholic Church and the Order of Malta throughout its history. The theme of this article is the ecclesial

dimension of “Obsequium pauperum”, charisma of our Order. Some aspects of this theme are considered in edition 4 of the Journals of Spirituality “*Tuitio fidei and Obsequium pauperum today*”; but I thought it appropriate to offer some reflections on the Encyclical “Deus Caritas est” of Benedict XVI.

The Encyclical « Deus Caritas est »

The second part of the Encyclical is entitled: “Caritas: The Practice of Love by the Church as a ‘Community of Love’”. In the prelude to this second part, the Holy Father evokes the “*rivers of living water that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit* (cf. Jn 7:38-39). “The Spirit,” writes the Pope, “is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, ...”, and again: “the Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community ... Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs” (n.19).

The Encyclical illustrates the ways in which the Church, as a community, has practised love of

one's neighbour and indicates how, through its various humanitarian activities over the years, the service of charity has been confirmed as one of the basic domains of the Church, along with the proclamation of the word of God and the celebration of the Sacraments. "For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (n.25).

We think we can place our Order's charitable works among those to which the Holy Father refers and thus find an ecclesial scope in the exercise of "obsequium pauperum".

Original premise for charitable action

The original premise for charitable action is the responsibility that every Christian and the Christian community has with regards to the Gospels. It is a responsibility resulting from baptismal grace and is nourished with participation in the Eucharist. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta found for herself and her religious a natural link between the morning meeting with Christ in the Eucharist and the service rendered daily to the poor in whom they saw the person of Christ.

The reference to Christ belongs to the Church's charitable mission. It is also vital that the Order of Malta makes a continual effort to highlight its charitable image; it is by making Christ central that we can ensure that the image is faithful to that of its origins, marked by such a strong Christian spirit.

Charity and works

It is necessary to clarify the meaning that the Order of Malta wants to give to its activities, which I think could be summed up by the following expression: charity-charitable works. It could be helpful to explain the language because modern mentality, and especially the mass-media, tends to unite benevolent societies under the umbrella of "charities" and even the various ecclesiastical aid institutions are sometimes simply called "caritas", "caritas internationalis", "diocesan caritas"....*In theological language* "caritas" is first of all the trinitary love of God; charity is grace; charity is the soul of the Church.

In this scenario, "caritas" is fraternal love that is translated into works or into institutions to give it a practical fulfillment with the various forms of aid. One thing must be clear: charity is not the same as

charitable works. In the Christian sense it is an assumption that supports and guides charitable works; we could call the result “industrious charity”.

Pointing out the meaning of these words also has a value for the Order of Malta. “Obsequium pauperum” in action is in fact “industrious charity”. The organization and ramifications of the works must be underpinned by Christian charity which is, in itself, a quality of a spiritual order. Therefore, if the Order’s works are based on such an intense charity, they also have a natural rapport with the Church. This rapport, albeit distinct from that of the actual ecclesiastic institutions, is real. The particular activities and works of the Order are defined by its relationship with the Church and by the Christian inspiration implicit in it. In this way its humanitarian work, performed in multiple ways and covering all situations, is distinguished from simply humanitarian institutions or from common welfare organizations.

Quality of workers who perform “obsequium pauperum”

The Pontifical Encyclical (31 a) states that: “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". The Order of Malta has always performed its works with exemplary competence, both when assisting the sick and in emergency humanitarian interventions. It will always be necessary to ensure that the Order's members and volunteers acquire a certain professional competence to enable them to act properly in the sphere in which they work. This does not mean that, especially in the care of the sick and the poor, non-specialists cannot offer the comfort of their presence, with a good word and simple gestures of heartfelt concern.

What everyone must possess is a clear motivation based on Christian training and practice and in that way, albeit in their legitimate particularity, they participate in the Church's mission. In this regard the Encyclical, (n.31 a) offers a very appropriate vision of the quality of workers who serve the suffering. The Pope writes that, "They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern", therefore, besides professional training, what is needed is "a 'formation of the heart' they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will be "a

consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. *Gal* 5:6).”.

Scope of industrious charity

Art. 2 of the Constitutional Charter clearly establishes the scope and motivation of “industrious charity” and explicitly asserts the link with the Church: “.....guided by the teachings of the Church, the Order affirms and propagates the Christian virtues of charity and brotherhood. The Order carries out its charitable works for the sick, the needy and refugees without distinction of religion, race, origin and age. The Order fulfils its institutional tasks especially by carrying out hospitaller works, including social and health assistance, as well as aiding victims of exceptional disasters and of war, attending also to their spiritual well-being and the strengthening of their faith in God”. This is a fundamental article, rich in content.

John XXIII, in a radio message to the faithful before the start of the Ecumenical Council, had already referred to the “Catholicness” of the Church, meaning that it is “the Church of everyone and especially the Church of the poor.” The Encyclical (n.30 a) cites the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity “*Apostolicam actuositatem*”, 8:

“Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures....charitable activity can and should embrace all people and all needs”, and adds: “Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world”.

The Pope then (n.31 c) gives us a warning that confirms the approach followed by our Order: “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 ... 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”. Also for the members of the Order of Malta it must be their interior *afflatus* that moves them and ensures “that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ”.

To widen the horizons of “industrious charity” does not mean only extending the geographical horizon of action but also not losing sight of the emerging areas of need, such as drug addiction, the

mass immigrations from the poor regions of the world, and so on. In a word, besides the “old poverty” in which our Order has always been expert, it is necessary to look at the “new poverty” which afflicts even advanced societies and requires new formulas and new initiatives: Pope John Paul II urged a “new ‘creativity’ in charity” (“Novo Millennio Ineunte”, n. 50).

We must not then forget those who participate in the Order’s “industrious charity” as volunteers. They deserve particular consideration. Volunteer work in its different forms has also been considered in the Encyclical “Deus caritas est” (n.30 b). The Pope talks about the volunteers who assume responsibility for providing a variety of assistance services and, expressing gratitude and appreciation, observes that: “For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness”. The Holy Father’s words are an encouragement to our Order to ensure that its own volunteers have training opportunities.

Fascinating associations

In the final part of the Encyclical, associations are made between the “industrious charity” that the

Church suggests and the Order of Malta's present situation. The Pope's first reflection involves the love to express for one's neighbour, nourished by an encounter with Christ. Thus sharing the needs and sufferings of others becomes a personal gift. We read in the Encyclical: "if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift" (n.34).

This is what the Knights of Malta did during the very early stages of our Order and are still doing today. I am thinking of those who take personal care of the sick; of the young people who on our pilgrimages help not only by pushing the wheelchairs of those they assist, but also by attempting to communicate a little of their youth; of the dames who, in taking gifts to the poor, want to meet them personally and learn about their problems; of the chaplains who, when visiting the sick, combine religious assistance with the comforting expression of their priestly soul.

The Holy Father invites us to pray as a way to extract new strength from Christ and warns about not being overtaken by the urgency of the action: "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 neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service.” (n.36). In our Order prayer holds a privileged place, in the liturgical celebrations, in the pilgrimages, in spiritual exercises, even in the summer camps for the disabled. The Pope’s invitation means that the individual members of the Order should develop their personal and familial piety. On the Pope’s part, the communication, by illustrating the Order’s humanitarian activities, should also open a window on this scenario and make it known.

The saints and the Virgin Mary

In the Conclusion, the Encyclical points out the example of *some Saints* as “lasting models of social charity”. In the short list of Saints to be found at n. 40 we could also insert the name of Blessed Gerard, who has left in the Order he founded a strong imprint of piety and “industrious charity”.

Finally, the Holy Father talks about Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness: “In the Gospel of Luke we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she remained for about three months (1:56) so as to

assist her in the final phase of her pregnancy"...
"Mary is a woman who loves... We see it in the delicacy with which she recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus" (.42).
The Pope entrusts to her the Church and her mission in the service of love.

In the pilgrimage to Assisi, the Grand Master, in prayer before her Icon, entrusts every year the entire Order of Malta to the Virgin Mary, venerated with the title of Our Lady of Mount Philermos, so that it can be faithful to its commitment to bear witness to the faith and to "industrious charity".

The Encyclical ends with an inspirational prayer:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,.....Show us Jesus.

Lead us to him.

Teach us to know and love him,

so that we too can become

capable of true love

and be fountains of living water

in the midst of a thirsting world".

Archbishop Angelo Acerbi
Prelate of the Order of Malta

The annual international pilgrimage of the sovereign Order of Malta to Lourdes: an experience in the practice of evangelical virtues in the mystery of the Church

When I stay in St. Stephen's monastery in Jerusalem, I sometimes visit the Holy Sepulchre, wandering through the streets of the old city, thinking of Jesus, his disciples, the Blessed Virgin Mary, of St. Joseph or St. John the Baptist. This prompts me to meditate on the mystery of Christ. He became incarnate for us, He became man to share the condition of men in His time. He was not understood and suffered and died - Image of God, presence of the Kingdom on earth, Light of the World, He in whom the Spirit of the Lord acted. His incarnation was for the salvation of all mankind of every time, and for all the people who today live here, without forgetting the pilgrims who come to renew their faith in this region, where God demonstrated his merciful love of humanity.

Throughout the centuries pilgrims have wanted to re-experience the mystery of the Redemption, the Paschal Mystery. This is the reason why people make a pilgrimage: to change their life to find

Christ in the places where he taught the crowds and his disciples. Becoming a pilgrim means leaving your house, your country and your habits so that you can become pervaded and transformed by divine grace. This means following in the steps of the Son of God and of those who founded the early Church. In a certain way it means rereading the Revelation with your feet and your entire body, liberating yourself from everything that could weigh you down in daily life.

I - *Blessed Gerard and the origin of the Order's charism as evangelical journey to the sources of the mystery of the Church*

At the beginning of the 11th century, when establishing their community near the Holy Sepulchre, the Benedictine monks wanted to live completely the mystery of the Redemption, whether through the liturgy and monastic life or by welcoming and serving the pilgrims who came to the places where the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ really happened. It was within this framework of communion of life and service that Blessed Gerard became aware of his vocation: to take care of sick pilgrims, whatever their origin or religion, just as Christ had done and

whom He served through them. It was through this evangelical communion, and especially the liturgy, with meditation on the Word of God and the sacraments, that one could spread the fruits of grace received through charitable works, revealing the dignity of the human person, just as Christ had done all His life.

In the Saint Sepulchre area, looking at the buildings which once housed the hospice of the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, I can measure how strong Christ's spirituality must have been for Blessed Gerard and his companions. He surrendered Himself to his Father even to the extent of dying on the cross and resurrecting so that men could be regenerated by the light of the Paschal Mystery. A true light that illuminates every person who comes into the world, meaning that Christ has brought a new life. And here we have to recall Mary and the apostle John at the foot of the cross. Is this not the birthplace of the Church, which will continue its mission until the end of time when Christ will return to judge everything?

The spirituality of the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem was born at the foot of Calvary and of the Holy Sepulchre; there where the monks celebrated the mystery of salvation through the

liturgy, at the heart of the Church's life, and where they welcomed so many who were tired, sick or in search of God. This community's charity gave pilgrims support, comfort and, besides physical care, also the necessary spiritual aid. The origin of the spirituality of the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, the origin of our Order, is to be found within this ecclesial framework.

The meaning of pilgrimage thus recaptures its ecclesial aspect. The events that led the Order to leave the Holy Land might make one regret the times of its origin. But the Order has been able, during the various periods of its history, to focus attention again on the essentials of the Christian mystery and the ecclesial life. And the Order's annual international pilgrimage to Lourdes is certainly one of its most meaningful examples.

II - The Annual International Pilgrimage of the Sovereign Order of Malta to Lourdes: ... to the mystery of Christ and of the Church

The Order of Malta's international pilgrimage to Lourdes is indubitably a special occasion, during which delegations from many countries, not to mention every continent, meet every year to perform for a few days our primary vocation,

service to the sick under Mary's gaze. Thus our life is refocused on Christ and on the mystery of the Church, through the call to conversion, through prayer, the liturgy, listening to the Word of God, the sacraments and service to the sick. We have however to interpret Lourdes and Our Lady's message through the intermediation of Bernadette, otherwise we risk depriving the Order of the treasure of spirituality that is offered to us on this occasion.

a) *Participating in the pilgrimage to Lourdes: revitalizing ourselves, through Our Lady with Saint Bernadette, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church*

The Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem were founded in Calvary near the tomb of the Risen Christ, an event marked by the presence of Mary at the foot of the Cross and by Christ Light of the World (symbolised by the Paschal candle in our liturgy). In the same way, the Order has made Lourdes one of its fundamental pilgrimages, following in the steps of Bernadette to regenerate itself in a place where the mystery of Christ and of the Church is symbolized by pilgrims from all nations who come to the Grotto of Massabielle -

individually or thanks to various organisations, diocesan or international. It is this aspect that we want to develop in all simplicity.

Coming to Lourdes means participating in the mystery of the Universal Church, reinvigorating yourself at the source of benediction to return home and immerse yourself once again in daily life glowing with this benediction. This is what Our Lady wanted to tell pilgrims through Bernadette. For achieving perfection, the Church recognizes the Order as a path for living the evangelical life. The Order is founded on its charisms, enabling the full flowering of Christians who, in serving the most needy and sick, are called to form one people in the mystery of the Church, called by God to holiness.

And yet, when rereading the account of the Apparitions and life of St. Bernadette, it is difficult to grasp this message immediately. The mysterious and surprising language that Our Lady uses confuses us when we approach the events that have made Lourdes one of the greatest and most important Marian cities. Our precise formulas, the rigorous logic of specific concepts, mean that our Western mentalities are little prepared for the symbolic actions involved in the story of Lourdes.

Our Lady did not come only for pilgrims who live in France or in the West, she was speaking to everyone because she is the mother of everyone. She wanted to give her message to all human beings. She did everything she could to adapt her ineffable maternity to our ineffable misery. Her people are not only intellectuals and theologians, but all those who cannot read, those minds who live only on imagination and to whom it was necessary to explain, in one way or another, the message she was bringing.

Simple people who have not been educated must be instructed by perceptible signs, such as pictures or images. The Apparitions thus form a series of evangelical pictures offered to us to meditate on: the mysteries of the Rosary.

b) *In Lourdes, the lesson is given by Our Lady's Apparitions to Bernadette*

But in Lourdes there are not only miracles, and anyway miracles only stress an initial fact. It is in the Apparitions that we should look for Our Lady's greatest teaching.

What is the message that the Holy Virgin came to bring us in Lourdes? What was her intention when she appeared to Bernadette Soubirous?

Our Lady did not appear by chance, but on the basis of a definite plan. Her teaching, her gestures and words, like the gestures and words of Bernadette who acted under the inspiration of her Vision, must have an eternally charged significance; her words and her gestures have, so to speak, an inexpressible universal scope. In Lourdes, the Virgin expressed herself in the language of symbolic action.

When Our Lord came down to earth, he preferred to use symbolic language. When Jesus Christ became flesh, he talked to people only in parables and similitudes. Jesus, as we are told by St. Matthew (Mt 13, 34-35), addressed the crowd in parables, so that he could fulfil what had been announced by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the creation of the world". For Jesus, the Creation is a book offering the best teaching.

Consider the Church: symbolism is everywhere, in the sacraments, in the ceremonies, in the liturgy...

Our Lady taught Bernadette and through her taught us. Bernadette is an instrument in the hands of the Holy Virgin, a reflection of Our Lady's will, her signs, her lips and her soul. The way in which,

for example, she makes the sign of the cross has an astonishing grace. Bernadette truly becomes another person, and witnesses find it difficult to believe that Soubirous' daughter could be so transfigured.

There is a current of inspiration from the grotto that takes hold of Bernadette and spreads throughout the crowd. Each of the spectators unknowingly plays the role of a providential personage. The scene has no sense if it does not refer to Our Lady and to Bernadette: without them, it is impossible to explain such different sentiments that the crowds feel at each of the Apparitions, almost as if Lourdes could restore to us all the expressions the Gospel prompts us to look for on Mary's face. We now realize that the Apparitions in Lourdes are the closest we can get to the Church's teaching.

The young girl is kneeling in front of the Grotto. In her right hand she holds a rosary and in the other a candle that symbolises Jesus, to whom we are, as Mary revealed to us, closely united by the Rosary. What is happening in the Grotto is a supernatural event; the mystery itself of Jesus is about to be shown. The lighted candle is the symbol of the Son of God incarnate, which means

that Bernadette was holding Christ himself. For the pilgrim holding the blessed candle means adhering to Jesus Christ... This is the same as confessing the entire mystery of Jesus, showing that we want to live it, to reproduce it with Him, for Him and in Him.

While Bernadette tells her beads, Our Lady teaches her, and with her all those who follow her, to recite that rosary, not only but with her lips but also and above all with her heart and spirit. The Mother of God chose a 15-year-old girl whose only assets were humility and docility and she made use of her to comment for us one by one the mysteries of the rosary, to offer them to us and to teach us to meditate on them.

To do this, Our Lady was often content with a simple “living tableau”. At other times a word or a gesture was enough to show us the focal point of the mystery. For each of her Apparitions, the face of the Seer reflects like a mirror the face of the Virgin, showing us the sentiments animating the actors of the evangelical scenes, the echo of which must remain in our own heart. This is the mystery in all its fullness that influences both body and soul. When Christ wants to talk to us of the kingdom, He tells us that “the kingdom of heaven is like.....”.

c) *In the pilgrim Church Our Lady's teaching shows how salvation has been accomplished by purification*

In the glory of her Assumption into heaven Mary, mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, preserves the mystery of her Son's human life from His conception on the day of the Annunciation to the day of the Assumption. She preserves the memory of the Messianic mystery, the mystery of salvation achieved by Christ. Anticipated in the mystery of Mary and her Assumption, that of salvation operates in the innermost core of human history through the descent of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of salvation is thus given here on earth for the Church and within the Church, which has the task of transmitting its sacrament from epoch to epoch to the ends of the earth.

Mary's faith, which marks the start of God's new and eternal alliance with humanity in Jesus Christ, is an heroic faith that lies hidden in the heart of the Church as a special heritage of the divine revelation. All those who, from generation to generation, accept the apostolic witness of the Church in some way participate in Mary's faith.

The Word made flesh in Mary truly entered human history, taking up residence in mankind. He

became the son of man so that God could become accustomed to residing in mankind, and Mary preserves the memory of this achievement for the Church. By becoming man for all mankind, the Word of God wanted to give a new dimension to the Law, and this is what is at stake at in the Paschal mystery in which God wanted to insert all mankind. Mary is the human figure, perfectly transparent for Christ Risen.

Mary preserves in her heart all the developments of the Mystery of Salvation, from the moment of the Annunciation of the Word in her flesh, up to His return. The liturgical celebration of the Mystery of Salvation is linked to the presence of Mary and to the journey of the pilgrim Church on earth. Mary, eschatological icon of the Church, brings about a universal renewal with her splendour. The Church's prayer thus ensures that the Mystery of Salvation reaches all people of all nations in their deepest beings.

Because of their misery, those marked with sin need to have their integrity restored. And for these people, being willing to receive the perfection of participating in the glory of the Father goes hand in hand with Purification. God does not want to separate one from the other. From Baptism on,

sanctification is combined with purification. And Mary's intervention is recognised in the fact that the spiritual recovery of human beings keeps pace with her teaching. Mary's lesson, which is the path of sanctification, demonstrates the accomplishment of the Messianic work. The symbolic value of Mary's intercession at the Marriage at Cana is proof of this: "When Jesus manifested his glory, his disciples believed in him" (Jn 2, 11).

d) *The teaching of Lourdes: without Christ and the Church we cannot practice the evangelical virtues*

At the time of the Massabielle Apparitions, the young Bernadette was attending neither school nor catechism. Although illiterate and with a poor memory, she was pious and obedient; her great simplicity was evident in her clear gaze. She was 14 years of age, and wanted to return to Lourdes to prepare for her First Communion. When she gave her name to the vicar in charge of catechism, he took no special notice of her. Heaven had chosen this innocent soul to elevate her destiny together with that of the world: a marvelous adventure was beginning.

In turn, following Bernadette and thanks to Our Lady's lessons, we have faith in a supernatural world where God the creator calls us to a destiny of eternity and leads us towards redemption, sanctification and participation in His divine life. We have this desire, and we follow it. Miracles are one of His magnificent responses, in which we can find the sign of His presence and His goodness, with its summons to an ineffable meeting...

If our contemporary civilization, pervaded with positivism and materialism, calls into question the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Lourdes reminds us of its most significant and valuable points, demonstrating that Jesus is always with the uneducated, the afflicted, the sick and the weak. And to all He repeats the Beatitudes.

Like the Gospel, in Lourdes, Mary, mother of Jesus, tells us to: "Do whatever He tells you" - these are the words that Mary repeats incessantly to the crowd in Lourdes. She reveals to us God's Wisdom, Power, Goodness and Truth. We are taught extremely important lessons in Lourdes. The world seeks power, pleasures and riches; the Lord only grants hidden virtues to Bernadette.

Our Lady did not promise happiness in this world to the young girl, but in the next one. There

is another world, from which She herself comes. Freely faithful to the Grace received, Bernadette said: "I have to earn this happiness". Following her, we have to earn it as well, with our virtues. What a lesson! Jesus, the Omnipotent, loved His mother more than anyone else. In His immense love He did not give her either gold or power, but the only eternal good, participation in the riches of the divine life. He kept her for ever from sin. We have to follow her on that journey, albeit from afar, and we will never be able to do it without effort, without striving or without the help of God.

"Prayer and Penitence," Mary tells us with Jesus. We too often think we can perform this with external rites, but they are worth little without love of God and love of one's neighbour, even though he might be a sinner despised by the world. "Pray for the sinners," repeats Bernadette. Love them. If you do not have charity, you have nothing. But how is it possible to observe the law of Love without ceding to our personal common sense?

"Go and tell the priests to build a chapel here". Mary reminds us that without the Church we would be cut off from Jesus Christ. Prayer, the Word of God, the sacramental life, the charitable life, the mission, are lived in the mystery of the

Church where the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist have a particular importance.

The marvels of this world prompt us to live better the Gospel, leading us to Redemption. The summons to conversion, the liturgy of the sacraments, the Word of God, attention towards the humble, the sick and the needy, those who suffer physically and morally and all those who have not yet found a meaning in their life, all this takes us back to the mystery of Lourdes.

* * *

The history of Lourdes is marvellously celebrated in the “Magnificat”. Bernadette is the delicate theme of the canticle of the “Lady”: “I have seen the humility of Your servant... she has exalted the humble”. Mary found in the little Bernadette Soubirous what God the Father had looked for in her when He had the Angel Gabriel greet her: simplicity, prudence and grace.

Mary's solidity is included in her submission: “Do whatever my Son tells you...”. Bernadette is also a strong-willed girl, but she obediently comes to the meetings with the “Lady“. Humility is all important, and this humility has a humus: love.

That love of God and of the Church that makes Bernadette Our Lady's messenger.

We, as members of the Order's international pilgrimage to Lourdes - attendants, professed, knights, chaplains or followers, sick or disabled - have in turn to bring this message to the world, this message that flows from the mystery of Christ and of the Church by Our Lady to the Grotto of Massabielle. We can do so through the spirituality of the Order's way of life, shaped by the mission the Church has entrusted to it. Under Our Lady's guidance, we bear witness to the Faith in our daily lives, with love, in the service of suffering humanity for God and the Church!

Father Guy Tardivy o.p.

General Spiritual Director of the International Pilgrimage
of the Order of Malta to Lourdes

Conventual Chaplain *ad honorem* of the S.M.O.M.
Prior of St. Stephen's Monastery – Biblical School of Jerusalem

Ecclesial aspects of the Associations of the Order of Malta in the United States

Connections between the Church and the Order in the United States are numerous and close. Of course, each of the three U. S. Associations is mindful of the obligation to assist the bishops where its members reside, and they frequently do so. And the assistance is mutual: many bishops and pastors serve as chaplains for the Associations, giving retreats, saying Masses, joining the Lourdes Pilgrimage.

But rather than detailing the relationships between the Church and the Order in the United States, this article will reflect on how the Order and its works in this country mirror some of the key characteristics of the Church, as defined in the documents of Vatican II and of the American bishops.

The Church is *universal*. (*Lumen Gentium*, §4) And the three U. S. Associations are part of an Order which spreads around the globe. Increasingly in recent years, the U. S. Knights and Dames have become more conscious of this geographical universality. Recitation of the Daily Prayer of the Order, for example, reminds us all that there are

fellow Knights and Dames around the world reciting the same prayer each day. And the U. S. Associations designate one day each year to hold, in cities across the country, a Mass for the Sanctity of Life – so that Knights and Dames throughout the nation may be united in liturgical prayer for life.

The sense of universality has been fostered by our participation in international SMOM meetings, such as the 2004 gathering in Malta. But the most visible indication, of course, is the Lourdes pilgrimage. As the three U. S. Associations have steadily increased the numbers of their members who join the pilgrimage each year, more and more American Knights and Dames have come into closer contact with Knights and Dames from other countries.

The Lourdes pilgrimage also reminds us of another aspect of universality: the openness of the Church to all manner of people. The streets and assembly places of Lourdes are filled with an astonishing variety of people. In particular, the *malades* and companions and volunteers who accompany us come from many walks of life and economic strata. And distinctions based on physical health, wealth, and social status are blurred by the realization that we are all *malades*.

The diversity of Lourdes is true, really, of the whole Church in the United States (and many other countries). One need only visit a church or cathedral in any big city to see the tremendous variety of people who come in and out of the church during the course of a morning. The United States has long been regarded as a “melting pot” for people of differing ethnic and national backgrounds. This country now has over 300 million residents, of whom 45 million are immigrants, and countless more are second generation immigrants. The Catholic Church in this country is even more diverse than the population of the nation. One writer said of the Church in the United States: “Here comes everybody!”

This wide variety within Catholicism reminds us that among the terms the Vatican II documents used to describe the Church is the “People of God.” As *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together. Among the Church's members,

there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church §814).

The Order reflects this aspect of the Church in a quite beautiful way. We are, of course, a lay religious order; while we form a part of the hierarchical structure of the Church, our essentially lay nature means that we can see ourselves as part of the People of God in a special way.

The *mission* of the Knights and Dames is also universal – geographically and in society. We are to defend the Faith against all challengers, and we are to assist Our Lords the Poor and Sick. And, as the Grand Master has pointed out, our Order seeks to benefit “the sick, the needy and refugees without distinction of religion, race, origin, or age.” (*Message from the Grand Master, 2003 Activity Report.*)

This mission of the Order mirrors and builds on the commitment of the Church to assist all in need. Charity is a priority for the Church in dioceses throughout the world, and this has been notably true in the United States, under the leadership of its bishops.

Charitable work is not, of course, a merely optional part of the life of the Church. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his first encyclical:

The exercise of charity... is as essential to her [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel....For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity, which could equally well be left for others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable part of her very being.

(*Dei Caritas Est*, §§ 22, 25).

As is the case with many other national associations, the U. S. Associations recognize that charity is at the core of Catholicism, and they give their members practical opportunities to engage in charitable works. Each of the Associations funds or operates major programs to aid the sick and the poor. The Federal Association operates facilities for poor and frail elderly in three cities; it offers opportunities for its members to personally work with AIDS patients and other needy persons. The American Association sponsors many projects, including the Malta House of Good Counsel and Women's Care Center Malta House, both of which assist pregnant women. The Western Association publishes three regional handbooks listing dozens of opportunities for "hands-on" volunteer service, such as assistance to the homeless, visitation of the sick, and medical clinics

for the poor. All the Associations make substantial contributions to charitable organizations in the USA and elsewhere which assist “Our Lords the Sick and the Poor.” And the three Associations have jointly organized a program in which Knights and Dames work in New Orleans to rebuild houses destroyed in Hurricane Katrina.

But writing checks and personal service are not all that our members have to contribute. Vatican II called the Church to reach out to embrace all people, all segments of society.

Moreover, since in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations...

(Gaudium et Spes §41)

Specifically, can the Order carry out Vatican II’s call to the People of God by serving as a bridge between the rich and the poor? The French Canadian Jean Vanier, who founded the L’Arche movement, has written:

Jesus is the One who walked between the two worlds... Jesus is the one who placed himself between Lazarus and the rich man, the Levite and the poor man beaten by brigands, lying half dead not far from Jericho.... Jesus is the one who wants to unite these two worlds.... We must look at Him, and follow Him.

(Be Not Afraid [1975], pp. 25-6)

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The U.S. bishops have labored mightily to bridge this gap. The Knights and Dames of Malta, many of us well connected to the affluent and influential segments of society, and yet active in our mission of service to the poor and the sick, may be well positioned to be such bridges. How fitting it would be if we, who profess our fealty to Our Lords the Poor and the Sick, were able to make that connection.

In this country, the Conference of Bishops has for over twenty years been making special efforts to present not only to Catholics, but also to all citizens, their obligations both in charity and in justice. The 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, for example, reminded all Americans of the preferential option for the poor:

As individuals and as a nation, therefore, we are called to make a fundamental "option for the poor". The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. This obligation is deeply rooted in Christian belief.

(Economic Justice for All, §87)

The question of economic justice and the option for the poor are fruitful areas for study by our members. The Federal Association held a workshop last year on issues of economic justice. It is hoped that more and more teaching and discussion of this topic will be organized by our Associations, in line with the consistent teaching of the Council, Popes, and bishops over the past century and more. Here again, the Associations would seek to “think with the Church” – *sentire cum Ecclesia*.

The Church is *holy*. Vatican II reminded us of the universal call to holiness: all people – clergy, religious and laity – rich and poor – Catholics,

Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and non-believers – are called to holiness. (*Lumen Gentium* §40) And particularly, among Catholics, holiness is not to be the exclusive province of the clergy and religious, nor is it reserved for a select few laypeople who have a special call. No, *all* of us in the People of God are called to holiness. And this is perhaps the aspect of the Church that is tied most closely to the spirituality of our Order.

As the website of the Western Association, USA states:

What distinguishes the Knights of Malta is their commitment to reaching their spiritual perfection within the Church and to expending their energies serving the poor and the sick.

The core of our spirituality is to grow in a life of prayer, formed in community, and actualized in the service of the poor and the sick.

The call to community is both compelling and challenging. Communities of men or women religious, and other small intentional communities, actually live together. But members of our Order in the United States almost never live together. And yet there is a yearning for community.

In their 1995 pastoral letter *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, the U. S. bishops called for more small faith communities among the laity. They cited *Christifideles Laici*:

"From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ." (§18)

They reflected that "the renewed outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost in our times has stimulated a great desire for experiences of deeper Christian community."

Called and Gifted reflected a profound truth about those who are serious about living their faith: with rare exceptions, *they cannot do it alone*. They need the mutual support and accountability of others. Worshiping at liturgy with others in church provides some of that support; more comes from small groups. But in one form or another, it is essential for us all.

And the three U. S. Associations have made efforts to find that deeper Christian community. Retreats, days of formation and of reflection, workshops, evenings of prayer have been held

throughout the country. Many smaller groups of Knights and Dames have been organized, especially in their own parishes. The Associations are working to bring to their members true community, that essential dimension of the Church.

This community carries over to the charitable works of the three Associations, too. In this we follow the tradition of the Church, as enunciated by the present Holy Father:

The ministry of charity, exercised in a communitarian, orderly way, became part of the fundamental structure of the Church.

(Deus Caritas Est, §21; italics added)

Community must be based on truth. To think with the Church is a central focus of each of the U. S. Associations. Each one has either instituted, or is in the process of doing so, efforts to provide its members with in-depth and accurate instruction on the Faith and its application to contemporary moral problems. Each Association also funds grants to organizations which, in a variety of ways, defend the Faith.

These are only a few examples of how the U. S. Associations have modeled their activities and efforts on the essential characteristics of the

Church. Let us conclude with a prayer composed by the American bishops as part of *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*. Each of us in the Order can make our own this prayer, with its themes of the call to holiness, community, compassion and service.

*GOD of love and mercy,
you call us to be your people,
you gift us with your abundant grace.
Make us a holy people, radiating the fullness of your love.
Form us into a community, a people who care,
expressing your compassion.
Remind us day after day of our baptismal call to serve,
with joy and courage.
Teach us how to grow in wisdom and grace and joy
in your presence.
Through Jesus and in your Spirit, we make this prayer.
Amen.*

William Shepherdson Abell

Ecclesial aspects of the Order of Malta in Latin America

With over nine centuries of history, the Order of St. John of Jerusalem has kept its spiritual, apostolic and charitable relevance; it has spread its evangelical message throughout the world, with the voice and the gestures of its special charisma. Its origins in the Holy Land have left indelible signs of a generous and courageous commitment so that its message remains topical. Just as always and everywhere we must affirm our faith in Christ the Saviour, so it is our Christian duty to exercise charity, and, in a confused world anxious for truth, to bear witness with behaviour and words to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The traditional formula expressing the aim of the Order of St. John – *defence of the faith and service of the poor* – is concrete and specific, and at the same time covers many aspects and spheres of life. The Order's expansion worldwide, beyond European borders, offers us new challenges. It has also reached the churches of Latin America and it is our task, in the places where it has taken root, to continue to obey the mandate it transmits to us like a key of spirituality, adapting ourselves to different

contexts. We have to do it at this time and in this continent, this “*continent of hope*”, domain of piety, but with the great and various challenges posed by both its fundamental gifts and needs and the advantages and drawbacks of modernity.

A vocation for our time

The Order’s relevance is demonstrated by the numerous works that give it visibility and underline its presence but also – and this is the most important thing for our Catholic faith – by the magisterium of the Supreme Pontiff and the support and guidance of the Pastors of the Church, who ensure that the Order follows a path of holiness and bears witness to evangelical life.

The service of charity towards the poor and needy, and especially the sick, is a priority for the Order’s members and its international legal personality helps it to achieve this aim. The many charitable works that it performs throughout the world are well known. They range from humanitarian participation in disasters and emergencies to permanent assistance in medical institutions and stations, cooperation in scientific research for medical progress and specialization in serious diseases afflicting the populations most

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exposed to risk because of social, cultural and economic conditions. We perform our mandate of charity – *obsequium pauperum* – through the personal contribution of the Order's knights and dames with their work and dedication. Those who become members of this spiritual family know that belonging is not enough; they must be present in the vast field of charity as their activities and situation permit, but always with generosity of time and effort.

Disciples of Christ

Such a great responsibility can only be borne with a heart renewed in Christ. Being a member of the Order of Malta's spiritual family constitutes the passionate continuity of a journey of conversion, living fully the baptismal vocation and achieving holiness with the means that the Church offers us through the Order. Charitable and apostolic work is fed and supported with the sacraments; it responds to the dynamism of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the faithful, and is accompanied by prayer and the practice of the virtues. The Order's tradition, with the example of its saints and blessed and the wealth of its almost millenary doctrine, continues to guide hearts and inspire behaviour.

Precisely when needs are greatest and most pressing, everything that is visible and concrete in the Christian's action must be based on the rock that is Christ and communion with Him. Spiritual life is the life of the Spirit in us, for the grace of God, and the point of departure for every action is heartfelt devotion to the Church. In our American continent, through our tradition of an intense spiritual life, the Order's members will receive the strength and energy to be present and offer their contribution of charity. The Order will not do it as a secular humanitarian organization, although it will give its contribution to alleviating pain, poverty and disease. Its evangelizing dimension is implicit in its identity, constantly nourished by the holiness of life and by the witness of faith, hope and charity.

To achieve this kind of presence one must pay due attention to the initial *formation* of the knights and dames, as well as to its continuation in an atmosphere of deep and sincere *spiritual commitment*. It is necessary to have a suitable knowledge of the Catholic doctrine contained in the Church's Catechism; attending sermons and meetings on topics of interest and the assiduous reading of important works on religious science can also be useful in this sense. Frequent and fervent

participation in the sacraments constitutes the most effective support for a life of communion with the Lord, and especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as well as frequent prayer, including the recital of the Liturgy of the Hours, which the Church specifically recommends for the laity, and spiritual exercises.

In many ways, Latin American society lacks a deep-rooted religious practice, a deep and exemplary life of faith; thus the efforts of our confrères worldwide have great value, with the power of a proclamation and a challenge for consciences.

The religious character of the Order of Malta

We cannot dwell too much here on this religious condition so essential for the Order's structure. However, in Latin America it is necessary to stress its significance because our Associations are relatively recent and we have no real experience of evangelical counselling based on the Order's tradition, to which the Church gives so much importance. The legal consistency that this confers on it determines the direction of its hospitaller and welfare activity. If the heart of the Order, where the

evangelical spirit of its initiatives is preserved, is rooted in the religious profession, then all its members, even those who do not take vows, must base their spiritual life and their external action on it. The chaplains are indispensable for educating and guiding members, to ensure that they demonstrate the supernatural meaning in their charitable works, thus offering the needy both spiritual and material support.

Our Order, as a religious order, demonstrates with its witness *the consecration to God* of all its actions; for all the others, the example of the professed knights and members in obedience is an essential dimension, elevating external works through the commitment of charity.

Love the Church and become its messengers

The Church has faith in the Order and considers it an instrument of sanctification offered to the faithful; a means for exercising charity, according to the motto of *Tuitio fidei and Obsequium pauperum*. As participants in this mission, we have to love the Church, living in communion with the Holy Father and with the bishops, remaining faithful to her spirit and to the instructions

imparted. There are innumerable situations where the Order's presence can show this heartfelt devotion to communion and bear witness to it. In Latin America, in our societies in turmoil with their many needs and where the lack of capable and generous leaders is felt, the brothers and sisters of the Order are expected to carry out a constructive, honest and efficient action, inspired by the highest spiritual principles. The following are some particularly important and essential aspects:

1. The spirituality of the Order creates an authentic Christian sense in lay people engaged in improving society. Political problems, especially worrying and frequent in our part of the world, mean that we have to participate seriously and responsibly, involving ourselves in community and social action and offering discreet and humble, albeit eloquent, teaching, on the side of justice, truth and solidarity.
2. A suitable training in the Church's social doctrine and in public and private morality should help the Order's members to affirm and transmit the principles of respect for human life, at both its beginning and end. These include principles for creating a civilization of

love and transmitting ethical values especially to the less protected sectors.

3. In families there is also a space for witness and example of life in communion, for education in values, for spiritual training and for shared responsibility. In this way one can act as a spur to the benefit of all.

Charity in the Order's initiatives and in personal initiatives: a challenge in Latin America

I have already pointed out the importance that charitable aims have in the personal life of knights and dames, as well as their institutional relevance as the Order's charisma. If the works promoted by the Pories or Associations are to continue and to be effective, then everyone has to commit themselves; this is because, besides their effectiveness and results, they have the intrinsic value of being the sign and fulfilment of a vocation. We have to emphasize this and put it into practice, not only by supporting the works from outside but also by personal commitment with our own initiatives.

Permit me to suggest a way, perhaps less visible but certainly effective, of extending the presence of Christian charity to the various sectors by means of

the Order of Malta's spirit. In the Latin American context, where one frequently finds difficult situations to which we must bring relief as the consequence of our vocation as Christians, every gesture of compassion and generosity bears the mark of our faith. The knights and dames of the Order thus express their commitment as members of the institution whose mission is that of reflecting the love of Christ for the poor and needy. Often this is an opportunity to start or to continue an initiative in this sense, and this will always have the merit of coming from the Order's spirit. Why not disseminate it, so that members may, wherever they live or work and according to their personal possibilities - with the Christian faith and under the patronage of St. John the Baptist, backed by the wise experience of a long tradition – offer their time, their intelligence and their generosity for assisting the poor and the sick? I am talking about places where the Order cannot arrive institutionally, but only make its presence felt through its members. In this way the task we have been entrusted by vocation will become more effective and the Order of Malta's spirit will be felt to the benefit of our *Lords the Poor*, with simple but authentic works.

May the Lord our God keep alive the spirit of our fathers and, following the example of Blessed Gerard, founder of our Order, under the protection of Blessed Mary, venerated with the title of Our Lady of Philermos, of St. John the Baptist, the Precursor, may we achieve what such a rich tradition teaches and encourages.

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In the name of the Host

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by the host” (Lk 14, 7-8).

This advice of Jesus is very practical and I assume most of us would instinctively act like this. What an embarrassing idea to confidently choose the place next to the hostess, while the host approaches you and quietly asks you to sit further to the end of the table. Even if Jesus obviously had good reason to teach the guests of that special evening in the Pharisees’ house this lesson, one would assume that this advice is not amongst Jesus’ most relevant teachings for us today.

And yet we need to be careful. It happened to me that I was invited to a big feast, together with 450 friends, half of which suffering from different handicaps, and I came exactly into that situation. Interestingly enough, we were the ones chosen to sit next to the hostess but these places had been taken by others. And as if that was not enough, the host could not even send those people back to the places that had been prepared for them. They simply decided to stay where they were. What am I

talking about? The World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne/Germany.

If you haven't heard of it already you will be able to guess what happened. As soon as the decision was made public that the World Youth Day (WYD) 2005 would take place in Cologne the German Association asked permission from the Order to have the International Summer Camp in Germany parallel to the WYD. The Summer Camp itself was (as usual) a big feast. But besides the regular program the perspective of all participants, especially of the handicapped, was to join into the international church and meet the Holy Father on the summit of an enormous feast of young catholic people. After having already joined into the program of the WYD on Wednesday and Friday the Sunday was expected to be a revelation of the power and the joy of the church – celebrating Holy Mass with one Million Christians and the Holy Father. On Saturday morning the team leaders discussed once more the pros and cons of this journey. They would have had to leave at 04:30 o'clock in the morning and a return before midnight seemed not very probable. More than this, it could have happened that our convoy of busses would have never reached the destination

because of the risk of a traffic collapse. And still, facing these obstacles the team leaders decided to take the challenge. We realised that it is our duty to bring the handicapped into the centre of the church, not just for their own sake, but also for the church's sake.

However, Saturday night (01:45 o'clock) the Manager of the WYD rang us up, asking us not to come. The area that was especially prepared for handicapped and held free for us was crowded by pilgrims. They wanted to be close to the altar, to sit close to the host. Nothing could make them move. This message struck us hard. Some of us worked all night and managed to improvise a live TV coverage of the Holy Mass with the Holy Father. When the Cardinal of Cologne explicitly greeted us on television, sharing our pain of not being present, we were a little bit comforted. Later we even heard that the Pope, who was informed at breakfast about what happened in the night, asked the Cardinal to do so.

Certainly there are various conclusions to be drawn from this experience. I want to point out the two most important from my perspective. First some practical advice for the understanding of our vocation: In the parable Jesus tells the guests of the

Pharisee he obviously does not only comment on the behaviour at a dinner invitation. Far more than this he gives an important clue about the dinner table to which God the Father invites his children. For every one of the invited there is a certain chair prepared. And I will only feel comfortable, free and truly loved at the very place that God will lead me to. Therefore we do good to stay at the doorway and to wait until God comes to bring us to our chair. Is this now trying to be an advice of how to behave in heaven? I don't know whether we need this type of practical hint for our moving in heaven. We certainly need it for finding our place in this world. Since Easter Sunday the kingdom of God has commenced. Since then the dinner table is prepared and we are put by baptism into the feast hall. He who seeks life in the grace of his baptism will live in unity with Christ. What else can it mean to sit at the father's dinner table?

But let me come back to the understanding of our vocation. Christ has never left a doubt that the poor and sick have their place in Abraham's lap, they will be seated at places of honour at the table of the feast. Now, as Dames and Knights of the Order of St. John we have to fight for the right of the poor to be at the places of honour. They have

to have the places of honour in our hearts, in our Order, in the Church and in society as a whole. This is not wishful thinking, this is a practical duty. In our parish the handicapped have to have their place next to the altar. At the next World Youth Day the handicapped have to be in the centre of the feast. In our heart neither shame nor laziness should hold us back from fighting for these rights. With all our might we have to be the advocates of the poor and needy: *Obsequim Pauperum*.

The second conclusion is about our own place at the table. It is already comforting to have a clear idea about one of our duties in the kingdom of God, which is to keep the places of honour free for those we are serving. But more than this, I believe as knights and dames we have to permanently review our behaviour at this feast of our lives. Are we waiting to be seated, or have we simply chosen a chair by ourselves? Are we permanently focussing on certain chairs, longing to sit on them, or are we indifferent? Coming back to what I said earlier I want to draw your attention to the place at the door. We are redeemed, we are in Christ and thus we are in the feast hall. In many respects we have already been lead to our chairs (e.g. marriage,

priesthood, job), but in others we haven't. Doesn't prayer life sometimes feel like sitting next to the host and in other times like being out of sight of the feast hall? Being called by Him is a constant process in which chairs are revealed to us and later again taken away. This is His way of healing us, His school of humbleness. This way He wants to reshape us in his own image – completely obedient to his will.

While it is comparably easy to physically serve the poor in his command, the true battlefield of our vocation lies here. We have to fight temptations, our pride and vanity and learn in Christ to be content with the place at the door. Only in this attitude we will be true dames and knights selflessly defending the faith and serving the poor in the name of the host.

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Finito di stampare nel mese di Aprile 2007
dalla Tipografia COPYGRAPH sas - Via A. Labriola, 38/40
00136 Roma - Tel. 0639735375 – Fax 0639728342