



HOLY PASTORS

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Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) and John Paul II(1920-2005),

TWO SAINTS WHO EMBRACED THE WORLD

On April 27, Pope Francis will declare the two popes John XXIII and John Paul II saint. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was already 77 when he was elected pope and took the name of John XXIII. Because of his advanced age and his captivating grandfatherly bonhomie, many thought he would be a “transition” pope. Instead, with the unexpected announcement of the Second Vatican Council, he opened a window in the Church to the winds of the Spirit and gave origin to the greatest religious event of the XX century. Karol Jozef Wojtyla, in the 27 years of his pontificate, was a world protagonist. While keeping the Church on a steady course, he performed some of the most original and forward-looking gestures in connection with the great challenges of our time: ecumenism, dialogue between religions, commitment to peace, even geo-politics in contributing to the fall of Communism. They both died in the sight of the world. The spectacle of their saintly death revealed the incredible, universal love they had attracted to themselves. By his original joining of the two holy persons, Pope Francis shows that what made the two very different characters commit themselves to the good of the Church and especially to the cause of the Second Vatican Council is their holiness. It is like stating that it is the same holiness that will assure to the Church the capacity of solving her increasingly grave and delicate problems, today and in the future.

On June 3, 1963, Pentecost day, the long agony of pope John XXIII, the pope of Vatican II, came to an end at 19.45 hours. Ten days before, on Ascension Day, he had spoken to the pilgrims in Saint Peter’s square for the last time, as if sensing the coming death: “With our desire we run after the Lord who goes up to heaven...”. Immediately, the public appearances were suspended, the pope was ill. The whole world followed the pope’s terminal illness with trepidation...The end was approaching, but his mind remained lucid to the last minute.

Pope John's death marked the climax of his pontificate and multiplied the consensus for a pope who had put in motion a phenomenon of unusual proportions as the Second Vatican Council. His death was experienced as belonging to the whole of humanity. It was a final witness of poverty, consistent with a lifestyle pursued with utter commitment.

He had written many years before, in his last will :“Born poor, but from honorable and humble people, I am particularly happy to die poor. I thank God for this grace of poverty that I vowed in my youth, spiritual poverty as a priest of the Sacred Heart, and real poverty...In the hour of saying farewell, or better, good-bye, I remind all of what is dearest in life: the blessed Jesus and his Church, the Gospel of the *Our Father*, truth and goodness, benevolent resourceful, patient, undefeated and victorious goodness”

A historical choice

A trait of great significance in pope John XXIII was the kind of peaceful strength by which he always expressed his convictions. Only during his rule as a pope, this strength appeared in all its disconcerting splendor. It was with this certainty, only ninety days after his election, on January 25 1959, that pope John XXIII announced his intention of calling an ecumenical council.

He made the announcement to the cardinals gathered in the basilica of Saint Paul outside the walls, on the concluding day of the Week of Prayers for Christian Unity. He repeatedly stated that he wanted a new Pentecost to again bring the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the Church, renew her youth and respond to the “signs of the time”, opening her anew to her universal mission.

The Second Vatican Council has marked the history of the modern Church. It took place between 1962 and 1965. Blessed John's successor, pope Paul VI, had the task of bringing the Council to its conclusion. The discussion among the Council Fathers was intense and articulate, the arguing vivacious, under the unusual attention of the interested world media. The Council Documents are solid contributions to the Church's doctrine and tradition. The whole Church turned a glance of empathy towards the “joys and sorrows” of humanity, conscious of belonging herself to the scene of this world.

A renewed vision of the Church as the pilgrim people of God brought in evidence the colorful reality of the local churches already present all over the world, as the fruit of the gigantic missionary wave of the XIX and the first part of the XX century. The liturgical reform enhanced the self-consciousness of the different local communities, empowered also by the renewed interest and appreciation of the Bible, God's Word. But what appeared as a historical choice that overcame the impasse of

centuries and really opened the horizon of the future was enclosed in three smaller documents.

With the decree “Unitatis Redintegratio” (*The Restoration of Unity*), the Catholic Church was now looking at the other Christian Churches as bearers of the same faith and was committing herself to the ecumenical cause. With the declaration “Dignitatis Humanae” (*The Dignity of the Human Person*), The Church was embracing the principle of freedom and in this way entering defenseless into the world arena, relying only in the power of God and in the self-evident goodness of the Gospel message.

With the declaration “Nostra Aetate”(In this Age of ours), the heart-warming conviction of God’s universal salvific will made the Church look at the non-Christian religions as genuine vehicles of “the seeds of the Spirit” and enter decidedly into the way of tolerance and dialogue. These positions are still vital after more than fifty years; they were embraced and carried forward by the forceful witness of pope John Paul II, in his exceptionally long pontificate, by pope Benedict and now by pope Francis.

Eve and the apple

Pope John XXIII was born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli at Sotto il Monte, a village near Bergamo, in Northern Italy, on November 25 1881. Son of a patriarchal family of farmers, he was marked since his childhood by a good, down-to-earth sense of realism and a profound, uncomplicated Christian faith. Very young he entered the seminary, was ordained a priest at 23. He progressed rapidly in his ecclesiastical career first as the Bishop’s secretary, then at Propaganda Fide in Rome.

Just before his priestly ordination, he had experienced military life because of the compulsory military service required by the state laws of that time and went back to the army as a priest during World War I, from 1915 to 1918, serving at the frontline as stretcher-bearer. In 1925 he was made a bishop and sent to Bulgaria as Apostolic Delegate. He spent ten years in close contact with the Orthodox Christianity and other ten years at Istanbul, in Turkey, in the same capacity, dealing with the Muslim world.

It was there that he weathered the World War II years and in 1944 he was sent by pope Pius XII to France as his nuncio. In all he served 28 years in the Vatican diplomacy and that shaped his personality. It was from this experience that he acquired his openness towards cultural worlds different from his own and honed his tolerant and humane approach to people.

In Parish, during a state dinner to which he took part in his official capacity, a lady with a plunging neckline happened to be seated not far from him. In the course of the meal and the conversation, Mons. Roncalli kindly offered an apple to the lady from the fruit bowl. To the puzzled look of the person seated near him, the nuncio whispered: “It was biting the apple that Eve realized that she was naked”. In 1953, he was made a cardinal and sent to Venice as patriarch. From there God chose him to succeed the prestigious figure of Pius XII, on October 28 1958. Then, the adventure of the Second Vatican Council began.

“Il papa buono”

Pope John’s death was his greatest homily on the theme of Christian faith as a public virtue. For centuries the conviction was taken for granted that what was relevant in the outstanding servants of the Church was almost exclusively their private virtue. At first sight, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli appeared just a common, ordinary Christian. Yet from him emerges a rare consciousness of the simplicity of confessing the Gospel to everybody without arrogance or omission. His search for meekness became more acute especially as an answer to his position of authority. His daring grew with the growing of his pastoral responsibility.

Pope John’s life is marked by the unbreakable unity between his religious personality and his service as pope. His spirituality appeared to be “common”, in as much as it reflected the condition common to all Christians. A telling evidence of this is in the name by which people liked to call him : *Il papa buono* (the “good” pope). “Good” is the commonest adjective and that with the most profound meaning. Now that, with his canonization, he will officially enter the company of the Saints, he points to the Church’s real strength.

The Pope from the East

The point of departure in considering the life and papacy of John Paul II is his Polish nationality: after more than 400 years of popes of Italian origin, he was the first non-Italian and a man from East Europe, and from the communist sphere of influence for that matter. Since the beginning, Pope John Paul II considered communism as a passing cloud and the unity of destiny of West and East Europe the real issue at stake. He defined West and East as the two lungs that enable Europe to breathe and once the united Europe was a reality, he powerfully kept pointing out the Christian roots of Europe.

Pope John Paul II was born Karol Józef Wojtyła on May 18, 1920, in Wadowice, Poland . His early life was marked by great loss. His mother died when he was 9 years old, and his older brother Edmund died when he was 12. Growing up, John

Paul was athletic and enjoyed skiing and swimming. He went to Krakow's University in 1938 where he showed an interest in theater and poetry. The school was closed the next year by Nazi troops during the German occupation of Poland.

Wanting to become a priest, John Paul began studying at a secret seminary run by the archbishop of Krakow. After World War II ended, he finished his religious studies at a Krakow seminary and was ordained in 1946. John Paul spent two years in Rome where he finished his doctorate in theology. He returned to his native Poland in 1948 and served in several parishes in and around Krakow.

John Paul became the bishop of Ombi in 1958 and then the archbishop of Krakow six years later. Considered among the Catholic Church's leading thinkers, he participated in the Second Vatican Council. As a member of the council, John Paul helped the church to examine its position in the world. Well regarded for his contributions to the church, John Paul was made a cardinal in 1967 by Pope Paul VI.

In 1978, John Paul was elected to the Chair of Peter, succeeding the tragic, brief pontificate of John Paul I. As the leader of the Catholic Church, he traveled the world, visiting more than 100 countries to spread his message of faith and peace. But it was in Rome that he faced the greatest threat to his life. In 1981, an assassin shot John Paul twice in St. Peter's Square in Vatican City. By a special grace that he attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he was able to recover from his injuries and later forgave his attacker.

Milestones of a pontificate

If we turn our attention to the great drama of our time, the fall of communism, we unlock the remarkable hidden history of John Paul II as one of the dominant figures of the twentieth century. He became the inspiration and the protector of Solidarity, a workers' movement in the heart of the Communist world, and contributed to keeping Solidarity alive underground after Moscow seemed to succeed in crushing it.

Exactly what part the Polish Pope played in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet empire with hardly a shot fired - contrary to the predictions of all observers - will be variously estimated by historians. Yet "everything that happened in Eastern Europe would have been impossible without the presence of this Pope," Mikhail Gorbachev has written. "How many divisions has the pope?" Stalin once asked contemptuously. Yet in the end it was Pope John Paul II who held the key to destroying the Soviet empire.

From the beginning of his pontificate in 1978, Pope John Paul understood that his commission from the Lord was to lead the Church into the new millennium. It is said that the Polish primate, Cardinal Wysinski, told John Paul II, immediately after his

election, that this was his task. Since his first encyclical letter, *Redemptor Hominis* (*The Redeemer of Man*), in the spring of 1979, John Paul II asked, “What should we do, in order that this new advent of the Church, the end of the second millennium, may bring us closer to God, the “Everlasting Father”? He wrote then that only one answer was possible: ‘Our spirit is set in one direction, towards Christ, the redeemer of man’”.

One cannot fail to notice the consistence in John Paul’s teaching if one takes into account that this is exactly the motto of his great document *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (*At the Beginning of a New Millennium*), written in order to lead the Church into the future: “Starting afresh from Christ”.

Martyrdom and Healing of Memories

At the beginning of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, John Paul II proposed the theme of martyrdom and pointed out the XX century as the century of martyrs: they are people killed not only in the name of Christ but because of defending human dignity, in the name of charity, justice and solidarity. Pope John Paul proclaimed saints scores of martyrs: martyrdom therefore becomes not a thing of the past but a wealth of the present for the Christian community and this embraces all the Churches.

It is as if the most basic ecumenism were the one of the different Christians who spilt their blood in one of the most violent eras of the history of humanity. John Paul II wrote in *Ut unum sint* (*So that they may be one*): “The courageous witness of so many martyrs of our times who belong to the different Christian denominations constitute as it were the vanguard of the ecumenical movement. From the places of their martyrdom, they exhort the Christians to speed up the journey towards unity. We can say that they are the prophets of unity: their blood seals the Lord’s appeal for unity. Their blood is not only *semen Christianorum* (*the seed of new Christians*), but also *semen unitatis* (*the seed of unity*)”.

One of the signs of the Great Jubilee Year that captured the imagination of the international media and of the Non Catholic was the purification of memories: John Paul II asking forgiveness for the sins and mistakes of the Church committed throughout the past millennia and especially during the last century.

To this purpose, he inserted a written prayer of forgiveness into one of the cracks of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, during his pilgrimage there. He pronounced a prayer of forgiveness in the synagogue of Yad Vashem, the place dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust, on the same occasion. These are not improvised gestures, but the mature fruit of the spirit of Vatican II, and one of the most interesting of his entire

pontificate, having a prophetic value: the purification of the historical memory opens wide the Church to the future.

World Youth Day

It was a stainless steel friendship that between John Paul II and the youth: an atypical relationship that bound the aged witness of the faith to the youth of the whole world. While many see our present day youth as escapist and without passion for anything, John Paul II saw in them inner strength and dreams and untapped energies. Gently, with a language that was at the same time plain and powerful, he invited them to be the protagonists of the future of the world.

They, on their turn, certainly perceived that he trusted them; they saw in him not a man who was backward looking, praising the goodness of a mythical past, an upholder of yesterday's wisdom. He portrayed the image of a complete man, who had known what life is as a university student, a factory worker, a writer and an actor before being a priest, a bishop and the pope.

John Paul's message to the youth was of extreme clarity. He could challenge them because he had lived himself the uncompromising demands he used to put on them. They loved his strong words because those were the words they needed.

More than thirty years ago, John Paul II had the great intuition of calling the World Youth Day gatherings in order to entrust a definite mission to them both in the church and in the world. For him, they were the future, they were those who will enact the civilization of love that will oppose the "culture of death" he often denounced.

And so, every two years, thousands have streamed together to the most distant and diverse parts of the world. Czestochowa, Santiago de Compostela, Denver, Toronto, Manila, etc. are names already pregnant of suggestions and appeal for the extraordinary temper of the encounters and the challenge given to the youth by their unusual idol. Some have happily contrasted this extraordinary concurrence of thousand of youth to the gatherings of young soldiers that only seventy years ago used to uphold the symbols of destruction and death of Nazism. The success of the World Youth Day has continued also with Benedict XVI and pope Francis.

The youth did not pity John Paul II even when he became old and sick: it was a sobering experience to see how a person so debilitated in his body could still have such a strong moral authority. John Paul II gave the impression of being younger than the youth themselves. He was recognized as one of the very few significant figures in the world of adults who was capable of capturing the imagination of the young. And

this precisely for the need the young feel for solid points of reference, for a guide that gives certainty.

“War never again!”

The most remarkable milestone was pope John Paul’s commitment to peace. In front of the threat of violence triggered by the black cloud of terrorism, looming at the horizon of humanity, John Paul II embraced the cause of peace with stubborn determination. The absolute condemnation of war on the part of the pope John Paul, who had already denied his approval to the Gulf War, put the Holy See in the front line of the vast worldwide pacifist movement opposing the American war in Iraq.

John Paul II repeated for the occasion the Meeting of Assisi that had been so remarkable for its prophetic value on its first happening in October 1986. Again at Assisi, on January 24, 2002, the leaders of most of the world’s major faiths carried lighted oil lamps signifying their hopes for global peace, as they joined Pope John Paul II at a ceremony marking the world day of prayer.

Together with him, clerics of faiths ranging from Christianity to Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and traditional African religions called for an end to all war, terror and violence. “Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! urged John Paul II, who had invited the religious leaders to the birthplace of St. Francis to pray for peace, following the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States.

The ceremony was attended by some 3,000 guests, including the Italian President, the Prime Minister and members of the Vatican’s diplomatic corps. John Paul II, who was suffering from the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, appeared in fine form throughout the day, playfully waving his cane to the crowds as he left Assisi.

Then, when John Paul’s health failed completely, the world withheld its breath in front of such human suffering and then, when he died, millions started flocking to Rome to pay their farewell to the greatest church Leader of the century. His funeral, with the bare wooden coffin and the book of the Gospel on top of it, the pages turning in the wind, was a world event that touched the imagination of millions and gave food for thought to even the most superficial of human beings. It was during the funeral that the demands “*Santo subito/Let he be declared saint at once*” appeared in the crowd. At the moment it seemed foolhardy. Now, only nine years later, it is a reality.

Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens (1904-1996)

FROM REFORM TO RENEWAL

Gifted with extraordinary intelligence, clarity of expression and deep spirituality, Cardinal Suenens played a pivotal part during Vatican II, aiming at the reform of the Church. Later he became the chaplain of the World Charismatic Renewal Movement. He said: "I used to be concerned with the motor of the car, now I am concerned with the fuel, the Holy Spirit's energy".

Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens had a charming personality and a strong faith which was both critical and serene. One of his favorite themes was that the Holy Spirit is the principle of surprise in the Church. He chose "In the Holy Spirit" as his Episcopal motto. It is the key to the unity of his life as Peter Hebblethwaite wrote.

In 1974, Suenens wrote a book "A New Pentecost", in this way disconcerting many of those who admired him for his commitment to the reform of the Church, but for himself seeking new horizons. From then on reform was swallowed up by renewal. But Suenens had not really changed. His old confidence in the Spirit at work in the world was simply transferred to this new movement.

He knew that it had its dangers and excesses. He wanted, in his own phrase, "to accompany it," to prevent it being divisive in the Church. In time, he hoped that "The Charismatic Movement" would cease to exist as a separate movement and flow into the life of the Church generally, just as the "biblical" and "liturgical" movements had renewed the whole Church.

Encouraged by pope Paul VI, Suenens became in effect the international chaplain of the Catholic charismatics. Responding to the charge that the charismatic movement took Christians away from social involvement, in 1978, he had meetings with Dom Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil, and tried to build a bridge to liberation theology.

After one year of the pontificate of pope John Paul II, Suenens, aged 75, retired from Malines-Brussels, in October 1979. By then his international reputation was secure. His influence had permeated the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) despite the suspicion and even antagonism of the more conservative elements in the Roman Curia. His strength lay in three factors: his manifest understanding of the modern world, his ability to convey this understanding in lucid language and, above all, the

trust which the popes John XXIII and Paul VI had placed in his judgment. He died at 92 in 1996.

From orphan to cardinal

Wealthy relatives wanted him to study economics and manage their fortune, but he Leo Joseph Suenens came from a relatively impoverished background. He was born at Ixelles, Belgium, in 1904, the only child of his parents. He was baptized by his uncle, who was also a priest. At the age four, he lost his father, who had owned and managed a small restaurant. Leo then lived with his mother in the rectory of his priest-uncle from 1911 to 1912.

chose the priesthood. He studied at Saint Mary's Institute in Schaerbeek and then entered the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome where he obtained a doctorate in theology and in philosophy and a master's degree in canon law.

Ordained to the priesthood on September 4, 1927, Suenens initially served as a professor of moral philosophy and pedagogy. In August 1940 he became vice-rector of the famed Catholic University of Louvain. When the Louvain's rector was arrested by Nazi forces in 1943, Suenens took over as acting rector, where he sometimes circumvented and sometimes openly defied the directives of the Nazi occupiers.

Raised to the rank of Monsignor in October 1941, he was included on a list of thirty hostages who were to be executed by the Nazis, but the Allied liberation of Belgium occurred shortly before these orders could be carried out.

On November 12, 1945, he was made Auxiliary Bishop of Malines-Brussels and he served in that position for sixteen years in this way gaining a precious experience as a pastor. He was eventually named Archbishop in 1961 and Cardinal in March 1962.

Protagonist at the Council

When Pope John called the world's bishops to Rome for the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), he found in Suenens a man who shared his views on the need for renewal in the Church. When the first session fell into organizational chaos under the weight of its documents, it was Suenens who, at the invitation of the Pope, rescued it from deadlock and essentially set the agenda for the entire Council.

By the opening of the second session in the autumn of 1963, John XXIII was dead and Montini was reigning as Pope Paul VI. He made Suenens one of the four moderators of the Council. Since the new Pope had a sensitivity to the problems of the age very similar to that of Suenens, the Council reflected their concerns accurately.

Bishop Samuel Ruiz García (1925-2011)

A CHAMPION OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

An impassioned defender of the Mayans in southern Mexico and a mediator in peace talks between Indian rebels and the government, he was uncompromisingly committed to the poor and used to say, "The only question we will have to answer at the end of time is how we treated the poor." Bishop Ruiz attracted a fervent following among Indians in Chiapas, who called him "Tatic," which means "father" in the Mayan language. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace prize several times. At his funeral, on January 26, President Felipe Calderon said that his death was a "big loss" for Mexico.

Mexico descends south from the United States to Guatemala, where its tail curves east towards the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. On its Pacific side lies the southernmost state of Chiapas, which has two ranges of the Sierra Madre mountains running through it. It is here that the Spaniards made an early settlement in the late 1520s soon after the conquest of Mexico, at Ciudad Real. It is in this remote and poor indigenous area that Father Samuel Ruiz Garcia was assigned as a bishop in 1959. He was only 35 years of age.

Since the departure of the Spaniards after 300 years, Mexico had become independent and had had a revolution; but little or nothing changed in Chiapas. Upon the achievement of independence in 1821, the Mexicans of Spanish descent, the Criollos, simply took over where the Spaniards had left off. Don Samuel arrived in a Chiapas plagued by injustices and abuses against indigenous peoples and the poor. He saw with his own eyes the backs of indigenous men marked by the whips of plantation owners, who paid three cents a day and forced workers to purchase from company stores with inflated prices. He also knew of female indigenous subjected to the 'law of the first night,' in which the bosses took the virginity of young women in their employment.

In the 1960s, Bishop Ruiz began speaking out against Chiapas' unwritten laws - such as those prohibiting Indians from walking the streets after dark – and, even into the early 1970s, forcing them to step off city sidewalks into the gutter whenever non-Indians approached. He said his faith led him to examine the roots of the injustice and prompted his writings on the exploitation of native Americans and his research into indigenous cosmology and theology. However, his remarks against the powerful

landlord class were construed by some - including some at the Vatican - as originating from Marxist class theory, rather than the Gospel. During Pope John Paul II's 1990 visit to Mexico, landowners published an open letter, accusing Bishop Ruiz of being a communist and fomenting class hatred.

Starting in 1970, Bishop Ruiz ordered translations of the Bible and other religious texts in the indigenous languages of Chiapas. He trained Indian catechists, or instructors, to organize village assemblies throughout the mountains and jungles of the diocese. By the end of his tenure, there were more than 20,000 Indian catechists in Chiapas. He made the word of God accessible to the people. Bishop Ruiz learned to speak four Mayan languages and often traveled by mule through his diocese, where he was affectionately called Don Samuel or "Tatic," which means father in a Mayan language.

In 1964, Ciudad Real was named San Cristobal de las Casas from Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, a 16th-century Dominican missionary from Spain who was one of the first bishops of Chiapas and well known Protector of the Indians. Bishop Ruiz said he knew he was following that legacy.

Doctor in Biblical Studies

Samuel Ruiz Garcia's own life had started in poverty: he was born on November 3, 1924, in Irapuato, in Guanajuato State in central Mexico. He was the eldest of five children, and his parents struggled to survive on a shared smallholding and a little grocery shop. His schooling was irregular at first, in part because of the stringent laws against Catholics and their schools in the years of persecution of the Mexican Church in the 1930s, after the Mexican revolution.

At the age of 13, however, things changed when he joined the diocesan minor seminary. He subsequently had a brilliant early career in the Church, going from the seminary in Mexico to ordination (1949), postgraduate studies and a doctorate in biblical studies in Rome after World War II. On his return to Mexico he became firstly a teacher, then rector of the diocesan seminary in León and subsequently a canon of León Cathedral, before being made Bishop of San Cristobal.

When Bishop Ruiz first arrived in Chiapas, although the state itself seemed stuck in its past, the Church in Latin America had begun a process of change which continued to move forward in the 50 years since, although the new bishop was not at first fully aware of the shape this was taking. He explained that he initially followed his predecessor in encouraging the work of catechists, who by their service and the example of their own lives inspired the rest of the community.

However, in hindsight he criticized this approach for its orientation towards Western attitudes and organization from the top down rather than from among the people themselves using their own cultural values. This comment comes from what is really his own testament to his work, the pastoral letter he wrote to his diocese on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II to the south of Mexico in August 1993, *En esta hora de gracia* ('In this hour of grace').

A Bishop's Conversion

From this and other sources one can sketch what Don Samuel considered to be his own growth in understanding, his 'conversion' as he himself called it. He was present at the Second Vatican Council and was particularly impressed by the part played by the bishops from Africa in putting together the decree *Ad Gentes* about the Church's missionary activity. They were lobbying strongly for a new approach to Christian anthropology which would help them more with their missionary work and value the dignity of different cultures.

He referred often to the influence that *Ad Gentes* had on him at a time when he says he himself was still thinking of ways to teach his people to substitute Spanish for their own indigenous languages in order to evangelize them and help them economically. He began to see more clearly that the Spanish missionaries had not come just to evangelize but also to impose their culture. And now here was *Ad Gentes*, advising Christians to familiarize themselves with their own national and religious traditions and seek out the seeds of The Word that lay latent within these.

The 'conversion' did not stop there. In 1968, CELAM held its second conference, this time in Medellín, Colombia, to look at ways of making Vatican II more readily applicable to the Latin American context. There was a dramatic shift in focus towards the widespread misery on the sub-continent which was diagnosed as coming from unjust social and economic structures which the poor were powerless to change. This attention to what was described famously as 'institutionalized violence', made a profound impression. So the catechists in Don Samuel's diocese became the spokespeople of their communities, which were considering all aspects – social, political, economic and cultural – of their situation in order to work out where the Spirit of God was leading them.

The next point of departure on Don Samuel's road was the Congress of the Indigenous that he held in San Cristobal in 1974. The communities had elected speakers whom they felt led straight lives and could represent them. The catechists of the diocese now were not just there to help with traditional catechetics, with services and singing, but were genuine representatives of their communities in all the matters most important to them.

There followed three days of lament for all the abuses that the indigenous peoples had suffered, with details, but also concrete suggestions about what to do in each case. By this time, Don Samuel could speak two of the four languages of the indigenous present and had a working knowledge of the others. He said that he learned enough at the meeting to see the inadequacy of his diocesan pastoral plan, which he scrapped there and then and developed another based on what he had heard.

Obviously all this sustained work to make his people aware of the sources of their problems and then encouraging them to discover and apply solutions, was sooner or later going to lead to conflict with those causing the problem: the large landowners and ranch owners and their political backers in the state of Chiapas as well as in the federal government.

The only mediator

When the frustration of the people finally broke out into the rebellion of *the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Liberation Army) on the first day of 1994, the first person to be blamed was Don Samuel. Supposedly, it was his scheming and his orchestration of the theology of violence that had driven the indigenous to join the rebel army and invade several towns. But this phase of blame passed when it became clear that he was the only mediator that the rebels would accept to deal with the government, and the parties met under his mediation in the cathedral in San Cristobal.

A truce was agreed and eventually an agreement on greater autonomy for the indigenous was made between the representatives of the government and the EZLN; however, it has not yet been formally promulgated, so their subjugation continues. What was more surprising was the tensions that Bishop Ruiz had with the Church. At a certain moment he was asked to resign and replied that if asked to by the pope, of course, he would do so. This did not happen and his later prestigious role as mediator further protected him.

But subsequently he was obliged to take a coadjutor bishop imposed on him. The coadjutor was the Dominican Raúl Vera OP, regarded by Church authorities as a suitably conservative restraint on Don Samuel. However, he was completely converted to Bishop Ruiz's mission to such an extent that when the time came for the bishop to retire and for Vera to take over, the Vatican decided that he was not the right man. None of Don Samuel's pastoral work has borne as yet the fruit he hoped for. In his final years, he trained and added hundreds of permanent deacons to his thousands of trained catechists, all of them indigenous, following the advice of Santo Domingo but worrying Church authorities. He resigned in 2000, having reached the age limit.

In 1996, Bishop Ruiz was awarded the *Pacem in Terris* Award. It was named after a 1963 encyclical letter by Pope John XXIII that calls upon all people of good will to secure peace among all nations. He won the Simón Bolívar International Prize from UNESCO in 2000 due to his efforts to fight poverty, exclusion, corruption, violence and for his help in the mutual understanding of Latin Americans.

Like prophet Jeremiah

‘I haven’t evangelized them, they have evangelized me!’ So Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia replied, with directness and humility, to a compliment about his work in his diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas in Mexico. This quiet, chubby, unassuming little man gave everything that he had of his mind and strength to the people of his diocese over the forty years that he was their bishop, to change the miseries that they had suffered over the five hundred years since the Spanish Conquest, and in many respects they continue to suffer today.

Retired Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia, known as the champion of the poor and indigenous in southern Mexico, died on January 24 of complications from long-standing illnesses. He was 86. Wearing a miter and stole embroidered with Mayan motifs, his body was buried in the cathedral in San Cristóbal accompanied by lamentation by the indigenous people to whom he had dedicated himself.

As he would have wished, bread and hot coffee were distributed in the perishing winter cold to the crowds who had flocked in from surrounding villages. At his funeral Mass, Raúl Vera, Bishop of Saltillo, who had been his auxiliary in San Cristóbal, recalled how Bishop Ruiz “always had eyes to see the image of God in each one of his brothers and sisters”. "Don Samuel was like the prophet Jeremiah, a man who lived and experienced contradiction," said Bishop Vera.

Mexican President Felipe Calderon said Bishop Ruiz's death "constitutes a great loss for Mexico". "Samuel Ruiz strove to build a more just Mexico - egalitarian, dignified and without discrimination in it - so that indigenous communities have a voice and their rights and freedoms are respected by all," the president said in a statement. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, visiting Mexico on January 24, said of Ruiz, "My colleagues say he was a tireless mediator that searched for reconciliation and justice through dialogue, and that is exactly the legacy we must honor and the example we all must follow."

Divine Providence gave Bishop Samuel the opportunity to make a difference in his four decades tenure of the diocese of Chiapas, as successor of Fray Bartolomé De Las Casas, the sixteen-century Defender of the Indios. He prophetically foresaw the increasing importance of the indigenous peoples of Latin America as the present

Archbishop Henry Karlen (1922-2012)

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

A Swiss missionary to Zimbabwe, recently deceased, he gained international fame for revealing to the world the Gukurahundi massacres of the Ntebele people under the government led by Robert Mugabe. Considered the father of Bulawayo Diocese, he had favored the struggle against white supremacy and supported the rule of the black majority. He was therefore disappointed by the atrocity of black people on black people, yet, after his retirement, he decided to stay and die there. His coat of arms was “In Nomine Domini”, in English “In the Name of the Lord”. After more than thirty years, Robert Mugabe still clings to power in Zimbabwe to the contempt of the whole world.

Last October 29, the long life of Archbishop emeritus Henry Karlen came to a conclusion at the age of 90 in Zimbabwe, his country of adoption. Thousands of Catholics attended his funeral in Bulawayo. Known as the “Father of Bulawayo Diocese” for his work of building the Church in Matabeleland, he was laid to rest at Athlone cemetery. Three cabinet ministers joined the mourners who included bishops from other churches.

The three minister were Mzila, Moyo and Coltard, who had been particularly close to Archbishop Karlen as a witness of the Gukurahundi massacres. Mzila, a liberation war veteran who was jailed by the Rhodesian administration, was arrested last year for attending a memorial service for the victims of the 1980s massacres. As a child, Moyo watched one of Mugabe’s inner circle burn down his parents’ home. Education minister Coltart, a lawyer by profession, was a director of the operational arm of the Legal Resources Foundation in Bulawayo and one of the main movers and authors of the “Breaking the Silence” report about the massacres.

The provincial superior of the Marian Hill Missionaries, Fr. Peter Nkomazana, said during the funeral, that the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe had lost one of its longest-serving leaders. He said that archbishop Karlen had been passionate about the Gukurahundi atrocities perpetrated by the people in power at that time, atrocities that he had disclosed to the world. This is why, even in his last days, he still said that he could not understand why Africans were killing each other. Moreover, till the last days, he had again passionately cared for the livelihood of the poor and for the people living with HIV and Aids.

Unsurprisingly absent from the funeral was president Robert Mugabe, the more than octogenarian former freedom fighter, still in power after more than thirty years, who had defined archbishop Karlen as “the sanctimonious prelate” at the time of the disclosure of the massacres.

The troublesome way to independence

In the XX century, the sixties saw the coming of age of black Africa with the declaration of independence of the majority of its countries. Some were handed independence on a golden platter by the colonial powers like Uganda where transition to independence from the British rule happened peacefully. Some fought bloody guerilla wars for it like Kenya, with the Mau Mau rebellion. Generally it was the presence of white settlers that made the passage difficult and slow, given the vested interests of the powerful minority. That was the case of Zimbabwe.

The nation of Zimbabwe, formerly the British colony of Rhodesia, is a landlocked country in southern Africa, bordered by Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. In 1965, the colony’s white minority refused the British plan of black majority rule as a requirement for independence and unilaterally declared Rhodesia independent. World opinion and a prolonged civil war forced Rhodesia’s white dominated government to accept a limited form of black majority rule in 1979.

Guerilla attacks however continued until late that year, when negotiations under British auspices led to a cease-fire and the restoration of British rule over the breakaway colony until new elections that included all groups could be held. In 1980, Rhodesia gained full legal independence under black majority rule, with Robert Mugabe as president and changed the name to Zimbabwe. The Catholic bishops of Zimbabwe had supported the struggle for independence of Mugabe and all the other leaders of the black majority.

Terrorized, starved and butchered

The new government was in the hands of the major tribe, the Shona, and of Robert Mugabe, the leader of ZANU. The other large tribe, the Ndebele, were under the movement of Joshua Nkomo, ZAPU, intending to run a democratic opposition. Three years after independence, reports filtered in to bishop Henry Karlen of Bulawayo from colleagues at rural churches, hospitals and mission stations, in the two Matabeleland provinces, about the slaughter of opposition supporters, loyal to leader Joshua Nkomo, widely known at that time as “Father Zimbabwe”.

Bishop Karlen had learnt that a new, North Korean-trained brigade was ordered into Matabeleland by Mugabe. Shaken but courageous Catholic clergy, and mission

hospital staff at St Luke's, reported to bishop Karlen about this new war, which was in many ways even more devastating than the war to end white rule.

He made notes of what he was told and his ghastly file grew with each harrowing account. Bishop Karlen presumed that Mugabe did not know about it and that, if he did know, he would stop it. So he tried to contact Mugabe, but his calls were not returned. In anguish he decided, in February 1983, to call Garfield Todd, the former Rhodesian prime minister.

Todd had many close friends and colleagues in the new Zimbabwe government. He was reviled by most whites, and his movements were restricted by Ian Smith, the leader of the white minority government, during the civil war, but Todd, the man who had a non-racial vision for Rhodesia, was honored by Mugabe after independence and made a senator.

Bishop Karlen told Todd that the state was perpetrating atrocities, that people were being terrorized, starved and butchered, and their property destroyed. He asked Todd to secure an appointment for him with Mugabe. Todd was aghast at what he heard. At Todd's request, the bishop sent his file to Todd's daughter, Judith, in the capital, Harare, who read it and forwarded it to senior members of Mugabe's government.

In March 1983, bishop Karlen and Mike Auret, director of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, met Mugabe for several hours ahead of the Bishop's Conference and handed him a report largely based on the bishop's notes. In his report to Mugabe on the atrocities, bishop Karlen wrote: "Your own soldiers are saying: 'We are sent by Mugabe to kill'". Then, the Zimbabwe Catholic Episcopal Conference issued a strongly worded pastoral letter by the title: "Peace is still possible", which estimated that thousands had been killed.

This was a difficult moment for the bishops. Some senior Catholic clergy had opposed white minority rule, and came to know and respect Mugabe when he went into exile in Mozambique to become president of ZANU, and commander of its military wing. Bishop Karlen and his colleagues had celebrated when the civil war ended and went out of their way to support the new government. The shock of learning about state-ordered massacres and the torture of Nkomo's supporters profoundly affected bishop Karlen and his fellow bishops.

A "moment of madness"

News of the atrocities broke in *The Star* and other newspapers of its group in South Africa and in *The Guardian* in London later in 1983. With increasing domestic and international outrage at what many believed was a genocide against Nkomo's supporters, and following the statement by the Zimbabwe's Bishops Conference, Mugabe retaliated by issuing the words "sanctimonious prelates" to describe bishop Karlen and his colleagues.

But he did appoint a commission of inquiry into the deaths, estimated by Mugabe's officials at 1500 people. The commission was chaired by Harare lawyer Simplicius Chihambakwe, still in practice in Harare. Bishop Karlen was relieved that the commission had been formed and went to give evidence, using the mass of information he had collected.

The commission completed its work in 1984, but Mugabe withheld its findings. The Legal Resources Foundation, a non-governmental organization, went to court seeking its release, but its application was refused. With no public document available, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation began a long and difficult investigation into the appalling events in Matabeleland, and the origins of the enmity between Mugabe's wartime forces and those loyal to Nkomo.

Bishop Karlen's file and his memory were a starting point for the investigators. Mugabe's intelligence agents hindered their work at every level, and the investigators were also hampered by lack of resources and fear among survivors about coming forward to give information. And many witnesses to the horrors had fled to South Africa during the height of the slaughter.

Eventually the two organizations produced a long, detailed report called: "Breaking the Silence – Building true peace", which estimated that about 20 thousand people had been killed in Matabeleland and in parts of the Midlands province from late 1982 until Nkomo, by then exhausted, went into an inclusive government with Mugabe in 1987.

When Auret released the report in 1997 only bishop Karlen and a second bishop endorsed its publication for general distribution. For the rest of his life bishop Karlen, who became archbishop in 1994, would say he could never understand why the new government chose to murder its citizens.

Mugabe described the Gukurahundi killings as "a moment of madness", but 20 years after they ended, victims are yet to receive any compensation. In 2001, Mugabe revoked Todd Garfield's Zimbabwe citizenship as a punishment for helping bishop Karlen in denouncing the Gukurahundi massacres.

The Good Shepherd

Archbishop Henry Karlen was born in Torbel, Switzerland, on February 1, 1922, to Victor and Victorina Karlen. Henry joined the Marian Hill Missionaries at the age of 20 in 1942. He made his perpetual profession in 1946 and was ordained to priesthood on June 22, 1947 in Switzerland. He got his doctorate in Theology in 1950. In 1951 he was assigned to Africa. His first post was at St. Peters Seminary in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, where he lectured in Moral Theology and Canon Law. His first appointment as a parish priest was in 1959 at Qhumbu Mission, Umtata, until 1963 when he was appointed the administrator of the Cathedral in Umtata.

In September 1968 he got his papal appointment by Paul VI to the order of Bishops. On December 12, the same year, he was consecrated the Bishop of Umtata Diocese. In 1974, in May, he was informed of his new appointment as the Bishop of Bulawayo. Thus he arrived in Bulawayo, the second capital city of Zimbabwe, destined to be his city in life and in death and his final resting place here on earth. His enthronement was on August 15, 1974. In 1994 he was appointed the Metropolitan Archbishop, thus receiving the Pallium as Archbishop from the then Apostolic Nuncio Peter Prabhu at St. Mary's Cathedral.

We can regard him as the good shepherd of Bulawayo Diocese because he built it up in so many aspects. He printed the Ndebele Sacramentary, the lectionary, the adult and children's catechism and promoted the active participation of the laity. In 1979 he was the first Bishop to ordain permanent married deacons: 9 men were ordained to the Order of Diaconate. This was a courageous, even, prophetic gesture since, only in other very rare cases, married people have been ordained as permanent deacons in Africa.

He opened four town parishes and as many mission stations. He instituted the annual pilgrimages to Empandeni Marian Shrine. Emthonjeni Pastoral Centre was his brain child so as to empower the pastoral workers in the diocese. During the civil war in 1970's and the disturbances in the 1980's, bishop Karlen was untiring in his courage to reach the people most affected by the violence. He retired as archbishop of Bulawayo in 1998.

He wrote the book "*The way of the cross of a Diocese*" to chronicle the murders of missionaries and civilians and what he had done to bring comfort to the families and recognition of these happenings to the international community. Among his other writing we have: "*The Spirituality of Marriage*", "*On Death and Dying*" and "*Towards a Self-supporting Church*". In 2007, at a public gathering in the large City Hall, he was conferred a Civic Awards "*Freedom of the City of Bulawayo*" by a Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) city government, then still in opposition to Mugabe, later in uneasy alliance.

Archbishop Karlen was the quintessential missionary and pastor who joined his life inextricably to the destiny of the people he served. A clever and well read priest, he excelled in all the jobs he was entrusted with, in teaching, in administration but especially in paying attention to the needs of the persons he served. To a superficial observer, he may have appeared as a person who was profoundly let down by those he had put his trust in.

This happened in civil life in a tragic way when he was forced to witness the betrayal of the black people of Zimbabwe by the very leaders who had brought them to independence. This seemed true also in Church life when the one who had stood by him during the time of denouncing the massacres and had later succeeded him as

Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

HEART TO HEART

“The heart speaks to the heart” this is the motto that the most illustrious of the converts to the Catholic Church took from the saint of kindness and affectivity, St. Francis De Sales, when he was made a cardinal. Born and reared in the classic Anglican tradition, he became a pastor and the leader of the Oxford Movement. He was considered one of the outstanding English intellectuals, yet John Henry Newman was converted by the humble holiness of blessed Domenic Barberi, an Italian priest. His passionate search for the authentic Christian roots, made him discover the Fathers of the Church and conceive his break-through theory of the Development of Doctrine. Today he is remembered as one who struggled to keep the mind of the Church open to what was good and valuable in the modern world. He used to say: “Everything in its time”. Pope Paul VI recognized the truth of this saying when he called Vatican II “Newman’s Council”. By proclaiming John Henry Newman a Blessed at Birmingham, on September 19, during his visit to England, Benedict XVI will express his personal admiration to a scholar who has shaped his thought and show his determination to continue in the spirit of Vatican II.

At the Consistory of May 15 1879, John Henry Newman was created a Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church. Leo XIII, who had recently been elected pope, personally desired to confer the dignity of Cardinal on the well-know English convert whom he affectionately called “my Cardinal “. On receiving the *biglietto* informing him of his elevation to the Cardinalate, three days before the above-mentioned Consistory, Newman addressed those present at Card. Howard’s residence in Rome. His *biglietto* speech was to become famous.

On that occasion, he renewed his protest against religious liberalism. He gave a precise description of this, a description whose prophetic character is obvious in our time. “Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is not positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion as

true. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matter of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy. Devotion is not necessarily founded on faith. If a person puts on a new religion every morning, what is that to you? It is as impertinent to think about a man's religion as about his sources of income or his management of his family. Religion is in no sense the bond of society".

Today we are witnesses of a mentality which sustains precisely these ideas, denounced by Newman, with very grave consequences for the cause of the Truth, for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, for the liturgy and spirituality and for the social and cultural dimension of the faith.

Blessed Cardinal Newman can remind everyone, pastors and lay people alike, that the Truth is a very precious treasure to be accepted with faith, proclaimed with honesty and defended with force. "Commonly the Church" as Cardinal Newman ends his discourse, "has nothing more to do but to go on in her own proper duties, in confidence and peace: to stand still and see the salvation of God".

Searching for the truth

Card. Newman was born in London on February 21 1801. The eldest of six children, three boys and three girls, Newman was the son of an English banker and his wife. His boyhood was just a normal boyhood, and he loved the things of children. He loved to fly his kite, loved walking and boating, but he did not enter into contact sports like rugby and soccer. He loved music and he loved to play his violin. He had an analytic mind and he delved deeper into thing than most boys of his own age did. From his grandmother Newman gained an eager love of scripture.

At the age of twelve, Newman showed a religiosity that seemed to be extreme. His father in his wisdom advised the young scholar that religiosity taken to extreme could weaken the mind. At that time, Jon Henry wrote: "God, grant me to pray earnestly against any illusion. Make me and keep me humble and teachable and cautious". When he was 15 years old, he experienced his "first conversion", which he himself considered one of the most significant graces of his life. It involved acute awareness of the existence and presence of God and of the invisible world.

In *Apologia ProVita Sua* he confessed that this experience did have a great influence in his personality "isolating me from the objects which surrounded me, confirming me in my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminous self-evident beings: myself and my Creator".

The first half of Newman's life is identified with Oxford, where he studied and taught, and which ever remained a kind of spiritual home. After ordination as an

Anglican priest, he assumed the prestigious post of Vicar of the University Church of Saint Mary. During the 1830s he achieved wide fame as one of the leaders of the Oxford movement, a conservative effort to restore the Church of England to holiness and Catholicity. Newman sums up the fundamental principle of the Oxford Movement in these words: “My battle was with liberalism; by liberalism I mean the anti-dogmatic principle and its development... From the age of 15, dogma has been the fundamental principle of my religion: I know no other religion; I cannot enter into the idea of any other sort of religion; religion, as a mere sentiment, is to me a dream and a mockery. As well can there be filial love without the fact of a father, as devotion without the fact of a Supreme Being”.

Newman realized that the polemic against religious liberalism needed the foundation of a sound doctrine. He was convinced that he had found the basis for it in the writings of the Fathers of the Church whom he admired as the true heralds and doctors of the Christian faith. In 1843, with immense labor, he composed the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, possibly his most original work as a theologian. He came to believe that the development of doctrine in the Roman church was not a distortion of the faith but an unfolding of its potentialities in response to new questions. Thus convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was faithful to its primitive origins, he accepted the inevitable conclusion that he should become a Catholic.

Rome sweet home

One of the things that had tormented Newman was that he did not see enough holiness in the Roman Catholic Church of that time. But this impression was somehow changed by an Italian Passionist priest, Fr. Dominic Barberi. Unknown to Newman at the time, Fr. Barberi was going around poorly dressed, preaching and frequently having things thrown at him. Newman later wrote of him: “His very look had about him something holy. When his form came within sight, I was moved to the depths in the strangest way. The joy and affability of his manner in the midst of all his sanctity were themselves like a holy sermon. No wonder that I became his convert and his penitent”.

Fr. Dominic’s vivid description of the scene of Newman’s conversion is beautiful. He writes: “ October 5, 1845 was a rainy day. I came out of the rain and took up my position by the fire to dry myself. The door opened and what a spectacle it was for me to see, at my feet, John Henry Newman begging me to hear his confession and admit him into the bosom of the Catholic Church. And there besides the fire, he began his general confession with extraordinary humility and devotion.

Newman was allowed to pursue ordination as a Catholic priest. To this end he was sent for a term of studies in Rome. There, meekly, he sat on a bench with people

much younger than himself, undergoing the rigors of the scholastic method. He did not find it congenial. Later he would write *A Grammar of Assent*, arguing against the idea that the Christian faith can be proved through logic.

With his ordination in 1847, Newman became a priest of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. Returning to England, he established an Oratory in working-class Birmingham. Newman was first of all the superior and principal organizer of a busy community of priests, with rapidly growing parishes for which churches and schools had to be provided. Moreover, Newman gave himself to writing. The success of his book *Apologia pro Vita Sua* gave Newman new life. In his sixty fourth year we find Newman renewed. The making of the *Apologia* was a real feat of writing and endurance. He completed 562 pages in ten weeks, planning and revising several times.

Newman worked daily from dawn to dusk on his work, and even at times for sixteen hours, even twenty two hours a day. To complete the picture of Newman laborious life, we need to remember his immense correspondence. He was swamped by letters of people anxious to be in touch with him. All these letters Newman carefully answered, and through these letters many became interested in and eventually converted to the Catholic Church.

There was an underlying feeling among some that Newman was not really a loyal Catholic. In 1859, his article "*On consulting the Laity in Matter of Faith*" was reported to Rome, casting a shadow over his name that would endure for decades. Yet, in 1867, Pope Pius IX sent him a personal assurance that he had no doubt about his orthodoxy, and two years later he invited him to be one of the theologians at the first Vatican Council. Then, in 1879, Leo XIII made him a cardinal.

Like a true genius, Newman, in himself, joined the opposites: he was a realist and a mystic, an intellectual and a very affectionate person. Especially dear to Newman was the mystery of the Incarnation: at Christmas he knelt in deep recollection before the crib. Newman was a true servant of Mary. He loved the rosary: he believed that this prayer turned the creed into a prayer. Newman had a great love for the saints, especially St Philip Neri.

From shadows to the light of truth

In modern times, no simple priest, without duties in the Roman Curia, had been raised to the Sacred College of Cardinals. Newman's elevation was hailed by the English nation and by Catholics everywhere with great enthusiasm. It broke down the wall of partition between Rome and England. It was for him like a point of arrival. By that time, he had revised all his writings and had a feeling of completion. Now his hand would serve him no more, but his mind kept its clearness always. In "*The Dream of Gerontius*" (1865), his poetic masterpiece, he anticipated his dying hours

Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan (1928-2002)

THE CROSS IN A BAR OF SOAP

This is how the Vietnamese bishop Nguyen Van Thuan kept the sign of his Christian faith in the long years he spent in communist prisons. A descendant of martyrs, he was called to witness the faith the hard way, before being chosen as a Cardinal and a preacher to the Pope. Because of all this, Benedict XVI, in his last encyclical letter, singled him out as a heroic witness of hope.

An unusual chalice

The war between the Communists from the North and the Southern forces backed by the Americans was raging in Vietnam when Bishop Francis-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan was named Coadjutor of the Archbishop of Saigon by pope Paul VI in 1975. That took place just few days before the South Vietnamese capital fell to the Communists and was renamed 'Ho Chi Minh City'. Bishop Van Thuan was 48. After only three months, on August 15 1975, solemnity of the Assumption, he was arrested and thrown into prison both because of his faith and his family connections (his uncle was a former President, assassinated in 1963).

There he remained, without a trial and a sentence, for 13 years, including 9 in isolation, until November 21, 1988. As he himself wrote, they were terrible years during which he did not allow himself to be overcome by despondency or even passive resignation. He made efforts to live out his captivity, "filling it with love". He was helped by the prayers of his faithful but especially of his mother who, from the moment of his arrest, never ceased to ask the Lord that her son be faithful to the Church.

Bishop Van Thuan was first driven 450 kilometers north, in the area of his former diocese of Nha Trang, where he was shut up alone, within earshot of the sea and of the bells of his former cathedral. "They tear at my heart", he wrote in his little book, *Five Loaves and Two Fish*. Later the VietCong took him north in the hull of a ship with 1500 starving prisoners. He was set to work in a "re-education" camp.

At the moment of his arrest, they allowed him write a letter to ask his relatives the most necessary things. He thought of asking a little wine as medicine against stomach-ache. His faithful understood very well that that wine would serve him to

celebrate the Eucharist. They therefore sent him a little bottle with the label: “Against stomach-ache”. With that wine he managed to say mass, using tiny hosts and the palm of his hand as a chalice.

He wrote: “The Eucharist has been for me and many others in prison the only strength, the only hope. What can be more consoling than the thought that Jesus is with you, suffers with you, cries with you. It reminds you that the entire Church is with you, starting from the pope. In your cell, you are never alone... But Jesus does much more than to go through your own pain. He helps you to change it into love. This is the difference”.

A Bible with scraps of paper

Up to the moment of his death bishop Van Thuan wore a memento of this period around his neck: a pectoral wooden cross on a fuse-wire chain which he fashioned in secret and hid for many years in a bar of soap. He wrote: “It is not beautiful but for me it is a symbol, a reminder always to love, and forgive and reconcile”.

This is how he describes the origin of that cross: “One day, while I was in the prison of Vinh Quang, I asked a guard to be allowed to cut a small piece of wood in the shape of a cross. Without hesitating, the guard agreed. In another circumstance, in a different prison, I asked a guard for a piece of electric wire. The guard was suspicious and scared because he thought I wanted to kill myself. But I reassured him explaining that I only wanted to make a kind of little chain for my wooden cross so that I could wear it around my neck. The guard not only got me the wire but also a pair of pliers and together we made the little chain”.

He could not take a bible with himself to prison. He then decided to collect all the scraps of paper and joined them together. He wrote in them 300 sentences from the Gospel that he remembered by heart. This makeshift bible, together with the Eucharist, was his source of strength, the daily treasure from which he used to draw his energies of resistance.

He was later returned to solitary confinement, guarded by two policemen who were changed every two weeks to avoid contamination. His strategy was to love them, smile, talk to them, teach them foreign languages and answer their questions about the Church... He also wrote a book of more than one thousand exhortations to his people that were smuggled out on sheets of paper torn from a diary, copied by a child into a school exercise book to escape detection, and taken out of the country by one of the boatpeople. *The Road to Hope* has been translated in more than ten languages.

Descendant of Martyrs

Cardinal Francis-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan was born in Hue, Vietnam, on April 17 1928. He was descending from a family profoundly Christian that counted among its elders numerous martyrs: in 1885 all the inhabitants of his mother's village were burned inside the parish church, with the exception of his grandfather who at that time was studying in Malaysia. Also some of his ancestors underwent fierce persecution and fell victims to it between the years 1698 and 1885.

His grandmother was illiterate but every night used to recite the rosary for priests. His mother Elizabeth, at the time of his death more than 100 years old and living in Australia, used to teach him the stories of the Bible and give him an account of the witness of the martyrs, especially his ancestors. She used to speak to him also about saint Therese of the Child Jesus.

On June 11 1953, he was ordained a priest. In 1959 he obtained a doctorate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Urban University. On his return to Vietnam he was the rector of the seminary and vicar general. He was appointed bishop of Nha Trang in 1967. He soon threw himself into pastoral activity. He increased the number of seminarians from 42 to 147, developed lay movements and youth groups, built schools and promoted pastoral councils. He always described himself as a man of action, which made his suffering in confinement, when it came, so much greater.

When he was released from prison, the Communist authorities remained suspicious of his family connections and prevented him from taking up his appointment as auxiliary bishop of Hanoi. He was placed under house arrest at the Hanoi residence of the Archbishop, Cardinal Joseph Marie Trinh Van Can. In 1991 he escaped from Vietnam, after a threat to his life from a Vietnamese government official.

Since he was forced into exile away from his country, John Paul II welcomed him to the Roman Curia and in 1998 made him President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. He created him a Cardinal in 2001. In March 2000, Cardinal Van Thuan preached the Lenten retreat for the Holy Father and the members of the Roman Curia. He would recall with pleasure the Holy Father's invitation: "In the first year of the Third Millennium, a Vietnamese will preach the spiritual exercises to the pope", he remarked. And when the pope asked him if he had a topic in mind, he answered: "Holy Father, I will speak about hope..."

Jesus' Mathematics

In the Spiritual Exercises, he described how he told his non-Catholic fellow prisoners, who were curious to know how he could go on hoping: "I left everything to

follow Jesus, because I love the defects of Jesus”. He explained: “On the cross, during his agony, Jesus heard the voice of the thief crucified on his right, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’. If I had been Jesus I would have told him: “I certainly will not forget you, but your crimes have to be expiated with at least twenty years of purgatory.

Instead Jesus tells him: ‘Today you will be with me in paradise’. He forgets all the man’s sins. He does exactly the same with the sinful woman who has anointed his feet with perfume. Jesus doesn’t ask her anything about her scandalous past. He simply says: ‘Her many sins have been forgiven because she loved much’. Jesus doesn’t have a memory like mine. He not only pardons, and pardons every person, he even forgets that he has pardoned”.

On another occasion he said: “If Jesus would have had to take a mathematics exam, he might have failed. He indicated this in the parable of the lost sheep...One of sheep becomes lost and, without delay, he sets out in search of it, leaving the other ninety-nine in the wilderness. Finding it, he puts the poor creature on his shoulders and returns to the fold. For Jesus, one is equal to ninety-nine – and perhaps more”.

The authority of suffering

During the same retreat, the Cardinal also emphasized the need to love one’s neighbor. “One day, in prison, I was asked by a guard: ‘Do you love us?’. I answered: ‘Yes, I love you’. ‘But we have kept you in prison for so many years, without a trial, without a sentence, and you love us? That’s impossible! Perhaps it is not true!’ I reminded him: ‘I have been with you many years, you have seen it’s true’ ‘When you are free, won’t you send your faithful to burn our homes, to kill our families?’ ‘No! Even if you want to kill me, I love you’. ‘But why?’ ‘Because Jesus has taught me to love everyone, even my enemies. If I don’t, I am no longer worthy to be called a Christian’. The guard said: ‘It’s very beautiful, but very hard to understand”.

The secret of Cardinal Van Thuan was his indomitable trust in God, nourished by prayer and suffering, accepted with love. The Eucharist changed the prison into his cathedral. The Body of Christ was his “medicine”. He recounted with great feeling: “Each time I celebrated the Mass, I had the opportunity to extend my hands and nail myself to the cross with Jesus, to drink with him the bitter chalice. Every day, in reciting the words of consecration, I confirmed with all my heart and soul a new pact, an eternal pact between Jesus and me, through his blood mixed with mine”.

Cardinal Francis-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan died on September 16 2002, in Rome, aged 74, after a battle with cancer over several months. During the last, long sickness, he kept his serenity, even joy...In the last days, when he was already unable to speak,

