



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace 126

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! Echo 127 out in May !

Message of 25 February 1996:

Dear children, I invite you today to conversion: this is the most important message that I have given you here.

My children, it is my desire that each of you be a bearer of my messages. I invite you, my little children, to live the messages I have given you over these years. This is a time of grace, especially now that also the Church invites you to prayer and conversion. My dear children, I too invite you: live the messages I have given you in this time since I first appeared here. Thank you for responding to my call.

Always time for "conversion!"

Mary's message and the Church accompany us during this favourable time of Lent: part of the time of grace marked by Her coming to the earth to prepare for the true Easter. Our Lady invites us to conversion. It is the most important message that She has given us here, because from conversion comes all the rest. But is not peace the first message? Mary's first words to the visionaries were: I wish to stay with you to convert you and reconcile the whole world (26.6.81). Peace is the goal to which She desires taking us, conversion is the way that leads to it.

1. Conversion was John Baptist's first invitation to the crowd, which Jesus repeats: Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel; if you do not convert you will all perish in the same way. The word conversion stems from the word repentance ("metanoia" which means change of mind, repentance for one's sins) and from this follows change of life ("epistrofré").

Conversion is the return of the heart to God, that the heart may not be divided, but be a flame which burns for Him, according to the first commandment: You shall love God with all your heart... and love your neighbour as yourself, or rather: as I have loved you. It must be a love like that of the trinitarian image in which we were created: in total communion with the others, as the three Persons are in communion. This love will not allow for inviolable hide-outs for idols, but must be wide open to receive Love.

Convert then to communion. If you have a brother or a sister, or a spouse, open your heart to him or her at the end of the day, confessing your errors, in a will to correct and purify yourselves. Let not the sun set upon your sin. James tells us that the first Christians confessed their sins to one another. And Jesus tell us: If your brother has sinned, go to him and admonish him in private; while Jesus reproved the apostles for remaining silent about what they had said along the way (Mk 9:33). Without this aperture towards the

others we are more easily influenced by occult bonds that tie down our heart.

2. Conversion: so let us begin by examining our relationships with those nearest to us. It is meaningful that during Lent the Church proposes the readings from both the Old and New Testaments that speak of reconciliation and works of mercy, especially in the family and towards our smaller brothers: let the oppressed go free, share your bread with the hungry, do not despise your own flesh, cease to point your finger, do not bear hatred for your brother in your heart, but tell him openly of his offence so as not to take a sin against yourself. Do you readily stop what you are doing to listen to or serve your brother in need? Or do you delay or refuse to because it disturbs your tranquillity?

3. Remember: prayer is the first step in conversion because it allows God to illumine us with His Word so we can see our errors and receive the strength to fight them. Then comes fasting from whatever obstructs our heart and cuts off the communication between God and us. In particular: fasting from sin, TV and certain literature and from curiosity, to favour a time to watch with Him (how many graces we will receive!). Then, on Wednesdays and Fridays, fasting on bread and water is a sign of acceptance of Mary and a way to participate in the Lord's passion and His battle against sin.

This creates in us a thirst for Jesus' Word and the desire to be united to His Body and Blood in the Eucharist: Holy Mass. Confession responds to our need to be purified of our sins; it makes our conscience more pure and delicate; it is where we receive the divine touch which heals; it is God's embrace...

4. Mary concludes with asking us to become bearers of Her messages, and to live them, not just 'listen to and talk about' them (25.5.91) if we want our words to have any weight and more importantly, Mary's presence to be credible. Psalm 51 will help us in our Lenten preparation. It describes man's repentance, conversion, his desire to communicate the new life (I will teach transgressors thy ways) and his perennial praise of God.

Fr.A.

MARY'S TIME

Pope's continued catechesis

With his catecheses on Mary during recent general audiences, the Pope has wished to clarify Mary's irreplaceable position in the life of the Church and the world.

1. "The Marian aspect of the Church ... is better revealed through the development of Mariological thought and devotion to the Blessed Virgin," explained the Pope on 15 November last. "Of course, the Blessed Virgin is totally related to Christ, the foundation of faith and ecclesial experience, and She leads to Him. That is why, in obedience to Jesus, Christians have venerated, loved and prayed to Mary in a most particular and fervent way. They have attributed to Her an important place in faith and piety, recognizing Her as the privileged way to Christ, the supreme Mediator.

The Church's Marian dimension is expressed in many ways in the life of believers testifying to the place Mary holds in their hearts. It is not a superficial sentiment but a deep and conscious emotional bond, rooted in the faith which spurs Christians of the past and present to turn habitually to Mary, to enter into a more intimate communion with Christ.

This reference to Mary binds not only committed Christians but also simple believers and even the

'distant.' Pilgrimages to Marian shrines are a sign of the Christian people's common sentiment for the Mother of the Lord. ... Marian shrines often become centres of evangelization. In the Church today, as in the community awaiting Pentecost, prayer with Mary spurs many Christians to the apostolate and to the service of their brothers and sisters."

2. Neither too little, nor too much on Mary - "It is necessary to emphasize that Marian teaching and devotion are not the fruit of sentimentality. Jesus Himself had invited his contemporaries not to be led by enthusiasm in considering His Mother, recognizing in Mary especially the one who is blessed because she listens to the word of God and keeps it (cf. Lk 11:28). Not only affection, but particularly the light of the Spirit must guide us in understanding the Mother of Jesus and Her contribution to the work of salvation. ...

The mystery of Mary requires... a method of doctrinal reflection no less rigorous than that used in theology... The Council strongly urges theologians and preachers of the divine word 'to be careful to refrain from all false exaggeration' (LG 67) ...which comes from those who adopt a maximalist attitude, which seeks to extend systematically to Mary the prerogatives of Christ and all the charisms of the Church. Instead it is always necessary in Marian doctrine to safeguard the infinite difference existing between the human person of Mary and the divine person of Jesus.

Likewise, the Council exhorts theologians and preachers to 'refrain from too summary an attitude ...in doctrinal positions, in exegetical interpretations and in acts of devotion which tend to reduce and almost deny Mary's importance in the history of salvation, her perpetual virginity and her holi-ness. Such extreme positions should always be avoided through a consistent and sincere fidelity to revealed truth as expressed in Scripture and in the Apostolic Tradition. The Council itself offers us a criterion for discerning authentic Marian doctrine: Mary occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and also closest to us' (LG 54)."

3. "Mary: hidden face of the Trinity" - "The Virgin Mother helps us to discover, at the origin of the whole work of salvation, the sovereign action of the Father... fulfilled by the Incarnation, through the work of the Holy Spirit, with the essential co-operation of a woman... Our Lady was granted the dignity of being the Mother of God; She is the favoured daughter of the Father and temple of the Holy Spirit. Mary's privileges and Her extraordinary relationship with the Trinity is to enable Her to co-operate in the salvation of the human race. The immeasurable greatness of the Lord's Mother remains a gift of God's love for all men." (Jan. 10)

4. "Mary, God's first ally against Satan" (24 Jan.) "The earliest documents bring the figure of a woman, Mother of the Redeemer, into a gradually clearer light. Among the biblical accounts which foretold the Mother of the Redeemer, the Council particularly cites those in which God revealed His plan of salvation after the fall of Adam and Eve. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gn 3:15).

These statements, called the Protogospel, (the first Good News) by Christian tradition since the 16th century, enable us to see that the Lord's first reaction to sin was not to punish the guilty but to offer them the hope of salvation and to involve them actively in the work of redemption... They also reveal the unique destiny of the woman... She was the serpent's first accomplice in enticing man to sin. Overturning this situation, God declares that He will make the woman the serpent's enemy and His first ally.

Who is this new woman, desired by God to restore woman's role and dignity and to contribute to changing humanity's destiny, co-operating through her maternal mission in God's victory over Satan?.. The new woman announced by the Protogospel is Mary, and in 'her seed' we recognize her Son Jesus, who triumphed over Satan's power in the paschal mystery." The Pope concludes: "We point out with joy that the term 'woman,' used in its generic form in the Genesis text, spurs women especially to join the Virgin of Nazareth and her task in the work of salvation, for they are called to take part in the fight

against the spirit of evil. Women, who like Eve, could succumb to Satan's seduction, through solidarity with Mary receive superior strength to combat the enemy, becoming God's first allies on the way of salvation.

God's mysterious alliance with woman can also be seen in a variety of ways in our day: in women's assiduous personal prayer and liturgical devotion, in their catechetical service and witness to charity, in the many feminine vocations to the consecrated life, in religious education in the family, etc.

Mary's unique vocation is inseparable from humanity's vocation and, in particular, from that of every woman."

"THEY SHALL NOT PREVAIL!" (Mt.16:18)

"The Eucharist and Our Lady will save the Church"

John Bosco's dream awaits a date -Among the prophetic dreams of St. John Bosco, one is famous and known as the dream of the "two pillars." This, in brief, is how the Saint described it:

"I saw a great battle in the sea: Peter was at the helm of his ship which was escorted by smaller ships. It was being struck at by many other ships which had waged battle against Peter's. The wind was blowing against them and the sea was swollen; the enemy ships seemed to have the better of them.

In the middle of the sea, however, I saw two pillars emerge. On the top of one was a great host, the Eucharist, and on top of the other which was not as high, there was a statue of Mary Immaculate with a sign saying *Auxilium christianorum* (Help of Christians). The battle got more furious and the Pope tried to steer his ship between the two pillars all the time being struck at by the other ships. With the weapons of the assailants mostly destroyed, they began fighting man-to-man. The Pope was severely wounded, but got back on his feet. He was wounded a second time and died, and the enemies rejoiced. The new Pope, elected straight away, took the helm and reached the two pillars where he tied up the ship with two chains. With the ship safe, the enemies fled, only to fight among themselves and sink into the sea."

The 500 young men who had gathered, like every evening, to hear John Bosco were shocked. It was May 1862. He did not explain the sense of the dream till the next morning. He told them that grave persecutions and travails were awaiting the Church, with only two means remaining to save her: Mary Help of Christians and the Eucharist.

When the Basilica of Mary Auxiliatrix was erected in Turin, John Bosco ordered: "Place these two great victories of Mary on the front." In fact, on the facade there are two medals being carried by angels. On one is printed the date of the victory of Lepanto (7 Oct. 1571) where Christians were saved from the Turkish invasion thanks to the Rosary. On this occasion, Pius V instituted the feast of the Holy Rosary. On the other medal we read the beginning of a date which will mark a future, far greater and Marian victory. It reads: "19..". The two missing figures will have to be added by us, in this century, when the event comes to be.

Can this dream be linked to what Our Lady said in Fatima: "My Immaculate Heart will triumph."? Of course, and it will also be a triumph for (Eucharistic) Jesus.

Enemies attack Peter's ship from within

A man-to-man battle on Peter's ship stands for the attack by enemies from within, which over the centuries have always damaged the Church much more than her declared enemies. The heresies, the schisms and the scandals are proof of this. Today its single objective seems to be to hit out at the Pope and Church unity. The little and faithful children of the Church are being called by the Helmsman to appeal to two invincible forces: the Eucharist (the presence of Jesus in the storm) and to Mary's intercession.

It is good to know of certain things, to be more aware of the serious danger that Church unity risks, and to suffer with the Pope, that a constant prayer be made to God for Peter (Acts 12:5) in union with the Virgin Mary. For example, knowing of the referendum organized in Austria which petitioned: for priesthood to be made available to women and married men; for the abolition of priestly celibacy; for admittance to the Sacraments by divorced people; and for the democratization of Church government, etc. Half a million signed in Austria, a third of this in Germany, and the petition is being extended to other countries. The referendum is, of course, illegitimate.

It is good to know of the book by German theologians which radically dissents from the entire contents of the latest Encyclicals: *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium vitae* and the letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*. In it they deny the Pope's competence in imposing moral precepts, saying his writings reflect personal opinion (*Osserv. Romano*).

It is good to know of the ambiguous document by the French episcopate dated 11 Feb. (*Mary Immaculate of Lourdes*) which wanted to open the way to the use of condoms (which do not guarantee safety) when there is risk of transmitting Aids. This contrasts with what the Pope has already said because it denies the principle of chastity.

"Let what you say be simply yes or no"

The explanations which followed, in an attempt to lessen the scandal, were not convincing. On the other hand, Bishop Maggiolini of Como threw much light onto the subject in an interview to *Corriere*, valid for anyone who thinks a compromise is possible: "That document is ambiguous and it can't be justified by saying: 'yes, that's what it says, but we meant to say something else.' You either have to speak clearly or say nothing. I ask myself how one could talk about Jesus Christ in such a way," and: "Even though they expressed themselves incorrectly, they still fell into the trap: the media ignores Church magisterium and cares only about details. And besides, was there any need for a document on Aids and condoms?"

Q. But the problem concerns thousands of people. How can you say there was no need for a document?

A. You see, the problem is another. Morals cannot be announced before faith. What sense is there in talking about moral precepts to a world which doesn't even believe in God? You have to start with the abc of the faith: God, Christ and the Church. Then, to those who believe, you propose the moral precepts which are a consequence of the faith. It is true that these precepts are comprehensible also by an upright mind (through the help of grace), but with faith man is able to better understand the value, say of a certain way of living sexuality.

Q. So you have to propose chastity, also to Aids sufferers, even if they're married?

A. Chastity is the ideal. The Church, however, knows man's difficulties and weaknesses and knows how to distinguish between one situation and another, but this is not possible in documents where only principles can be established.

Q. Well, where is it done?

A. In the confessionals. You see, we priests have to be uncompromising when in the pulpit and very comprehensive in the confessionals. It is in individual relations that one tries to understand, to help, to forgive...

Q. Many lay people, however, were elated for the French Bishops' letter.

A. Excuse me if I say it, but it makes me laugh. Do they need the Pope's blessing to use condoms? Why do those who say they don't believe also pretend that the Church should change her ways? Rather than going against the Church, some seem to go against reason.

"Do not fear the one who can kill your body..."

Compromising with sin is Satan's work. He who closes an eye to sin with the excuse of solving difficult human problems, forgets man's eternal destiny and limits himself to satisfying human needs: Man does not live on bread alone! Like this, the vision of man according to faith exists no longer. Neither can one say things only half way, or in a way that is not comprehensible, for fear of being considered backward and at the same time of not wanting to break with ecclesial communion.

As Christians we cannot pretend that what we say or how we do things will be understood by others. It's madness to think that the media will accept the word of the cross which is a stumbling block and folly (1Co1:18-23). When with those who do think in such a way and throw doubts onto the teachings of the Church, remember: hate even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 23). If anyone refuses to obey, have nothing to do with him (2 Thess 3:14).

The occult forces of the antichrist have entered the Church: They went out from us, but they were not of us (1Jn 2:19). That the freemasonry has arrived as far as Peter's threshold is not a fable. Paul warned: the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition exalts himself .. so as to take the seat in the temple of God (2Thess 2:3). We then, armoured with the Eucharist and Mary's intercession, will immerse ourselves in the contemplation of Jesus and His works.

Fr.A.

HELP THE POPE on the way up Calvary

"Do not let him fall into the hands of the enemies": was how the Church prayed for the Pope. Now, Bishop Hnilica appeals to all Marian groups: "One of the Pope's greatest sufferings are the divisions within the Church. His teachings are opposed by certain chairs, some priests and even some Bishops who

do not accept the totality of the Pope's vocation as guide to the Church, thereby creating scandals, estrangement, indifference and disobedience, to the point of curbing the Church's missionary impetus... The Popes have always had to suffer, but this pontificate in particular is marked by repeated attacks against the primacy of Peter. One of the most recent is the referendum in Austria... For us of the Church of the East, who were persecuted for our fidelity to Christ and His vicar, it was vitally important to love the Pope, because it was this that made us different. The only accusation made against us was our fidelity to Peter. The Communists offered us freedom in exchange of our denial. Here in the West I have seen the secular, Masonic spirit infiltrate more and more into the Church. Its enemies are the Virgin and the Pope and since they cannot eliminate them, they try to reduce them to mere symbols under the influence of satanic inspiration. The same thing happens with some sacraments where the lay and secular materialistic movement does not allow for God's love and grace; so we have confession which tends to disappear and Holy Communion reduced to a symbol. The Church is assailed by lay groups and fundamentalist sects and weakened by certain internal dissents. It is painful to admit that this indifference, and even opposition, to the Person and universal vocation of the Pope is instilled in the minds of young seminarians by theologians and exegetes who forcefully teach their heresies from chairs supposedly Catholic."

The Bishop goes on to mention the persecutions in the Eastern Church and her rebirth, fruit of the martyrs' blood. Of John Paul II he says: "He is the man of the divine mercy for our times, prepared by Mary's Immaculate Heart to introduce the Church into the third millennium," and he invites everyone to pray so he will not be alone.

The letter concludes with the Pope's own words, pronounced in Fatima during the act of consecration to the Virgin Mary:

May the infinite power of the Merciful Love be revealed once again in the history of the world! to stop all evil! to transform all consciences! May the light of Hope be unveiled in your Immaculate Heart, for all mankind!

After the cross comes consolation

God Who consoles the humble reserved a day of exaltation for the Pope in Nicaragua after the bitter experience of 13 years ago when loud protests were organized during the Mass celebrated by the Pope in Managua. This time his visit was a peaceful triumph amid the same people. "Nicaragua has passed from the dark night into the sunlight. Central America, once a field where the two super-powers confronted each other, has now regained its human and Christian sovereignty, by the grace of God." The Pope walked hand in hand with the country's President, Mrs Violetta Barrios de Chamorro, as he once did with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, in an expression of, "the Church's intention to walk hand in hand with women."

Holocaust of innocent victims to atone for sins of man

45 million abortions in the world every year! One abortion for every 3 births! The UN Fund for Populations didn't want to alarm anyone; they don't care less about the 45 million victims. Their only concern is the health of the mothers. For this reason they also blew up the number of women who lose their life because of poor sanitary conditions, so that the legalization of abortion can be extended to the third-world countries...

200,000 priests, of various creeds, were killed in Russia during the Soviet regime. Another 500,000 were arrested and sent to prison or concentration camps. The information is official and was supplied by the president of the commission instituted by Yeltsin for the rehabilitation of the victims of political repression. If we add the enormous number of Christians, victims of atheism/Communism in other Communist regimes, it can be said that never before has the Church been so martyred. According to the president of the commission, Mr. Jakovlev, the victims of 70 years of Communism number 60 million.

On the religious situation in Europe

Only radical Christianity able to convince today

In this interview, Card. Vlk of Prague, who had been imprisoned by the Communists, talks of the need for a more radical presentation of the Gospel.

"Society in Europe is becoming more radical. I see in this a sign that people are not happy with the solutions offered for today's problems and are seeking more radical solutions. I think the same thing is happening in the Church... The Church needs to read into this radicalness to try and understand, and use more radical solutions also. This means living the Gospel more radically, as some movements in the Church have been doing for decades."

Q. Do you think this outlook is realistic today?

A. Yes, because when one begins living more radically, even in the Church, the fruits are immediate. Just think of the religious orders: which ones have more vocations? Those who live more radically. And the movements: there is a growing number of members because they live radically. I would say this is a direction [to take] for the future.

Q. Also John Paul II follows this line, but he receives a lot of criticism. How do you see this?

A. We have seen an easy-free type of Christianity for years, and it's not producing fruit today. Only the radicalness I have spoken of can move us ahead.

Q. What about the people who have lived for decades under Communism, are they ready to accept the Gospel message?

A. Yes, I would say that they are ready, but they must be given a pure, radical message. I do not think that our past has purified us enough to be true witnesses of the pure Gospel. What this society wants is Gospel experience. Preaching the Gospel is not as important as being a witness of it, but we are not always up to this. If we look at the former Communist countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary) we ask

ourselves why the public opinion has shifted to the left. I think it is because the Church is still not thoroughly renewed, and this Church as it is now is not accepted by society.

Q. Since the total destruction of religious devotion in Russia, people hunger for faith but are unable to distinguish between faith and superstition and end up joining the sects...

A. You know that the human soul thirsts for what is divine and if it does not find a Church it seeks out a sect, because Communism robbed the Church of her communion - with God and among men - reducing religion to a private thing. The sects attract because they glow with an apparent communion and love of others. The world today needs this communion, where men are closer to one another and to God, and where God is closer to man...

(cf. Avvenire 11 Feb.)

Would you like to see God glorified by you? Then rejoice in your brother's progress and you will immediately give glory to God. Because his servant could conquer envy by rejoicing in the merits of others, God will be praised. (St John Chrysostom - CCC 2540)

Satan's wrongdoings

These days Satan is fashionable. The Bible speaks truthfully about him; also in Medjugorje Our Lady has spoken often of him. The mass media gives him too much attention, in particular on TV, and confound people's ideas, especially through all the space given to sorcerers, fortune-tellers and all kinds of swindlers - when they're not advertising sects! Those who know and believe less is the clergy. Why? And why is it that when one needs an exorcist's opinion they can't be found? Many these days turn to the various forms of occultism and spiritualism, while educators are unable to give correct information. Other problems: how to distinguish between an ailment caused by a curse and a psychic illness? How much do prayers of liberation help in certain difficulties and odd behaviour? When is it necessary to get the help of an exorcist? These and other questions are answered in the new book by our cooperator, Fr. Gabriel Amorth: *Exorcists and Psychiatrists* (available only in Italian). We strongly underline the author's recommendation: 'We must fear sin, not the devil,' and Paul VI's words: 'Everything that defends us from sin will defend us from the evil one.'

1. "Could a bad dream of the evil one be fruit of one's psyche or also of his presence?" Fr. Amorth responds:

A. We know that dreams depend on our subconscious. It is normal for all of us to suffer from nightmares at some time or other in our life due to frightful memories, fears regarding our health or some other misfortune. To reply to this question, however, I would say we can in part pilot all our dreams. In other words, it is necessary when we are awake that we nourish ourselves with positive things that are pleasing to God, and to watch over what we read or see. This way we eliminate the devil's presence [from our lives] and we will have no further fear of him. The Bible never tells us to fear him, but to "resist him, firm in your faith, because he prowls around seeking someone to devour," and: "resist him in the armour of God" (cf. 1Pt 5:8-9; Eph 6:11).

Unfortunately, the mass media, in particular the TV, do not offer a good service in this regards. See 'Misteri' for example (a programme on Italian TV regarding mysteries, parapsychology, etc.) and similar

programmes: the devil makes news and they have jumped on the band wagon. I see them all as negative, even the one I participated in. They all falsify the facts, and this is precisely what the devil wants: either not speak about him at all so he can act freely, or speak too much of him, making him the protagonist of the story, whilst the protagonist is Christ.

To conclude, literature and shows which instil fear should be avoided, especially by young people. This means comic books, cartoons and pictures of those fearful monstrous characters too. How can people (young or old) not suffer from nightmares when they are nourished with violence and terrifying images? Another thing is feeling safe, certain of God's help, of the protection of Mary and the Guardian Angels. [The importance, thus, of not going to bed after watching TV without first praying. The Lord will reward us generously for the time we give Him. The Rosary is very effective when said before going to bed, as is praying with the heart and talking to Jesus. Then it is a case of: "my heart watches as I sleep." Ed. note.]

2. The secret of Fatima speaks of a third world war, but no Pope has ever had the courage to reveal it. A negative event has been prophesied for the second half of this century: only 5 years are missing! Humanity is in mortal danger, but no one is saying it...

A. I have my doubts about the third secret. Pius XII did not open it since Lucia had said it should be opened only after 1960. It was Pope John who first read it with great care, then gave it to the most important members of the Secretary of State and the Holy Office to read it, for their opinion. Pope John then dictated to his secretary, Msgr. Capovilla who is still alive, a note to be attached to the envelope containing the third secret. This note explained why he decided not to publish the secret. Msgr. Capovilla said:

The Pope did not wrong anyone since the secret was addressed to him. Had Our Lady wanted it to be published, it would have been done so, as with the other two. Furthermore, I think that the reasons adopted by Pope John were more than founded because Paul VI asked me where the envelope was as soon as he became Pope and for the same reasons he too decided not to publish it; the same with John Paul II. Why? Much has been written about the secret, not all is true. Our Lady does not come to tell us of future disasters, but to teach us how to avoid them.

To the many apparitions all over the world, I reply with Mary's and with Lucia's words: 'Since men do not accept the message, God's last alternative is to send me.' The reason behind the many apparitions in the world is to call mankind to conversion, because God wants to use His mercy through those who accept Mary's calls and change life. And what a movement of conversion Mary has started up! All through the Bible we read that God is patient, so patient, ever so patient... then comes the chastisement. But it is not God Who chastises; it is man who chastises himself and his own kind. God does not send chastisements.

With regards the contents of the third secret, which has never been revealed, there is a lot of invention in the publications that circulate. For example, one of them begins with the words, "My little one," while Our Lady never used this expression with Lucia. Another phrase in these publications which Our Lady never used is this: "Did you see the miracle of the sun?" In 1977 Pope John Paul I asked Lucia: "Did you like the miracle of the sun?" to which Lucia replied: "I did not see it." In fact, Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco had personal visions during the miracle and did not see the sun.

Our Lady is urgently calling us to conversion, just like the Church teachings. The important thing is that we take heed. Much prayer is needed. The message of Fatima is the great message of this century; all the others, including that of Medjugorje, are the continuation of it. That message, however, ends with an expression of immense hope: 'In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph and there will be a period of peace.'

News from the blessed land

US Archbishop gives witness in Medjugorje

It was the beginning of February when Archbishop Philip Hannan of New Orleans, now bishop emeritus, came to visit us. He founded a radio and television station to help those who suffer. He and his team visited some Bosnian towns such as Tuzla and Sarajevo, where they met Card. Puljic, and the Shrine of Mary Queen of Peace in Medjugorje. Here they remained two days and visited the Village of the Mother. Bishop Hannan was so moved by the sufferings of the little orphans that he said in tears: "God Himself inspired the builders of this village."

They then visited and admired Sr. Elvira's Community where young drug addicts are healed of their addiction. This was his third visit to Medjugorje and before departing he commented: "I have always experienced a profound atmosphere of peace and faith here and I experience the same thing in all those who have been here. They return home with a profound faith, and return to a life of sacraments and prayer. They start up prayer groups which are a source of grace for many.

For this reason I recommend to everyone, especially the youth, to come here on pilgrimage and to tell the others of their experience. May a chain of peace and faith be thus formed in the world."

More than 500 cases of prodigious healings

The fathers of Medjugorje are always discreet about these facts; it is known, however, that the number of cases is considerable. Those registered and inclusive of scientific documentation exceed the 500 mark. About 30 of these are truly extraordinary and thoroughly documented (serious and/or terminal diseases which suddenly and inexplicably heal). Many of these cases have been subjected to a series of scientific investigations starting from back in 1984, similar to tests, etc. made upon the visionaries (the results of which have always been positive).

It is normal for God to send "signs and prodigies" to help confirm the faith in the things that He sends to us, such as supernatural manifestations, prophetic words and the truthfulness and holiness of His witnesses. The Gospel confirms this: These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up serpents... while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (Mk 16:16-19).

Fr. Jozo nominated "high priest" of indians -

A moving episode of his Canadian visit. Fr. Jozo tells: "A group of Canadian indians desired a prayer meeting, with me present, and urged their bishop to organize it. The venue was a hall not far from their little church, and it was so moving that we all began to cry: a meeting to cherish! The Chief greeted and welcomed the Bishop and I and said it was an historic moment for Canada and his people: 99% of the indian population are Catholic and desire belonging to Mary, so they accept Her message of peace for the

world. Afterwards, the Chief nominated me "high priest" and honorary chief of all the indians (a decision which their counsel made). When I received my insignia the man with the peace pipe came to me and announced that the indians had decided to light it for Croatia. When it was lit they gave it to me. Each time they passed it on they cried out: "for Croatia!" Afterwards they all prayed for me and the Croatian population. The Chief, with rosary beads in his hands, called Medjugorje a blessed land; the land that gives the same messages that they dream. Then he blessed Medjugorje and the Croatian population and prayed that the war might end forever."

Testimony of US pilot -

We have already spoken about Scott O'Grady who was rescued after falling from his plane last June (Echo 122). In a book he described how he suffered hunger, thirst and the cold and how he feared as he lay hiding in the forest waiting for help. A very significant experience tied to this ordeal is of a spiritual nature. "...I was reflecting on how survival is above all a spiritual test and I experienced something really incredible. I suddenly recalled how a friend's mother had told me that prior to the war she had been to a place where they say the Madonna appears. So I appealed to her and I immediately felt her presence; a presence which became clearer and clearer and more tangible till I could actually see her. It's hard to describe with words; the vision made me feel incredibly warm and happy and peaceful: there was someone who was praying and watching over me. That vision is the most important thing that happened to me in Bosnia. It gave me the courage to hang on in the difficult moments." The American pilot's declaration made immediately after the rescue operation was: "The Madonna of Medjugorje saved me."

Twenty young artists took part in an artistic seminar in the Domus Pacis house directed by famous Italian artist Carmelo Puzzolo, the author of the bronze stations on Krizevac and of the Rosary mysteries on Podbrdo. (Press Bulletin)

* **Fr. Slavko and Mirjana's** successful Indian Ocean tour saw filled churches. When he was asked about official Church recognition, he remarked: "The Communists were the first to recognize the Medjugorje apparitions... In 1981, on the third day, they told the visionaries: 'Your Gospa is angry with us' - like the evil spirit in the Gospel which cried out to Jesus: 'What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth - have you come for our ruin?'"

* **Fr. Jozo** has departed for a long tour of Italy. In March he will be in Sarajevo with Fr. Ivan to hold a mission. They will preach in many parishes, where souls are really in need of the Word of God. Let us offer prayers for them.

* **Francesco Maria Lunetti**, second son for Paolo and Marija (Pavlovic), was born on 24th January. Baby and mother are well. The message of the 25th was given to Marija by Our Lady in a quiet moment when she was not busy with visitors or with the babe.

* **Pilip Dragicevic**, Jakov's uncle, died unexpectedly. He took Jakov into his home when Jakov was orphaned at the age of ten.

(From Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

Medjugorje continues in Civitavecchia

Thousands of conversions, 23 physical healings - "It is something that cannot be explained by human reasoning. Something irrational happened in my very hands. I will never tire of telling people about it," said the Bishop, Msgr. Grillo, on the second anniversary of the lachrymation of the statue of Our Lady of Medjugorje in Civitavecchia. The Bishop also spoke of "many cases - about 20 or 23 - of healings through Mary's intercession. One in particular regards a child who awoke from irreversible coma." Msgr. Grillo spoke of the infinite graces and of the 300,000 pilgrims from all over the world who visited the shrine last year, and of the thousands of conversions: in particular 120 Jehovah's Witnesses, numerous Protestants and some Buddhists. The number of votive offerings continues to grow, "especially wedding rings," says the Bishop, "left by reconciled couples, and baby shoes and needles left by drug addicts": all proof of how "Our Lady offers Her maternal love above all to young couples, the youth and children." The Bishop excludes that the tears could be fruit of a "diabolic presence," saying that many exorcists have confirmed the absence of evil influence.

The prelate confesses that he asked Our Lady for a sign: "Two days before the statue wept while I was holding it, I dreamt that Our Lady had entrusted me with a message. It was a lovely, sweet message." Msgr. Grillo also explained why he agreed to be interviewed by the national TV: "Since I had been told that the investigating committee was planning to confiscate the statue, I hoped that making the event public would impede this."

A book on the subject includes a testimony by the heart specialist from the local hospital who says: "I first saw the statue when it underwent the first series of tests and I noticed that the blood was the typical dark red colour of oxidized blood. When Msgr. Grillo called me on the same day it wept while in his hands, I was able to notice a small trickle of blood bright red in colour, typical of fresh blood."

First anniversary, 2 Feb. In the parish of St. Augustine people continued to arrive the day long despite the rain. It is estimated that at least 10,000 visited the shrine. From 6am to 10.30pm dozens of priests were present for confession and to concelebrate at one of the Masses. The celebrations included an 8 km-long penitential procession under the rain. Hundreds participated. Msgr. Grillo then celebrated high Mass in front of the church, during which the city of Rome was consecrated to Mary's Immaculate Heart. Groups of children recited the Rosary in the garden where the statue first wept.

Also Jelena visited Civitavecchia once, and afterwards asked Our Lady why she could not go unnoticed, instead of being the centre of attention. Our Lady is said to have replied: I also suffer for being the centre of attention, but if my presence brings men closer to Jesus I shall continue with my mission. More signs are wanted for this generation, but the sign is Jesus. If these signs (the tears of Civitavecchia) do not draw people to Jesus then the existence of these cannot be justified.

The evil one behind depression

Many specialists have written and spoken about Medj. A well known psychiatrist from India granted us

this interview during a recent visit. He also studies parapsychology in manifestations of the faith.

"My name is Paul James Pandalakaman. I was born in Kerala, in the southern part of India where Thomas the Apostle arrived as a missionary of the Gospel in the wake of the many Hebrews who came here for trade. We Christians of Kerala consider ourselves as descendents of those Hindus known as 'St. Thomas' Christians.'

In 1981, the year Our Lady appeared in Medjugorje, I was in England to further my studies. I came to know of the apparitions only four years later. At the end of the course I decided to go to Medjugorje. I was very impressed! I had worked as a psychiatrist in India, but since Medjugorje I discovered that psychiatry was something quite different to what I had always believed. I was aware that often I could do nothing to help most of the cases I was treating, and would have left my job if Medjugorje had not given me the certainty that I could, instead, help many. Today I am convinced that I can help those suffering especially from depression.

Q. How? A. We are taught that depression depends on chemical unbalance. After Medj. I realized that this is not the case, that other non-chemical elements must be considered. I found that depression can also be provoked by the action of evil spirits. I believed in their existence, but gave them little importance. The Virgin said quite clearly in Her messages that the evil spirits continue to act, and I see that the more I look into depression the more I see the action of the evil spirit which is at the origin of depression.

Q. Can you give us any examples?

A. More and more married couples separate. Our Lady said that the devil influences people's behaviour and creates divisions in relationships. Many then suffer from nervous breakdowns or other psychic disturbances; they take anti-depressants, but this doesn't solve their problems. A separated spouse loses sight of the right amount of giving and taking prior to the break-up, and we do nothing to help them get back together. Through accepting Mary's message, those who come to us for help will be able to renew the marriage commitment and solve their problems.

Q. What about parapsychology?

A. Sadly, many think that parapsychology is a substitute for faith; this can lead to atheism (human spirituality without God). Aberrant science, where the reality of God has no importance, favours the development of unnatural behaviour, such as trying to declare as unnatural or unreal that which is mysterious. On the other hand, another type of parapsychology believes in the reality beyond this world. My knowledge of parapsychology helped me to accept Fatima. I thus became aware of extraordinary messages. The Marian apparitions are proof of God's existence, of Paradise, of Purgatory and of Hell. I have also visited Lourdes and Banneux, but now I limit myself to visiting Medjugorje because things are still happening here. Our Lady really does appear...

(From Nasa Ognista, Dec. 1995)

MARY'S PROGRAMME for peace

Fr. Slavko on the theme "Teaching Peace" during a retreat in Cervia, Nov.'95.

Groups: maternal cell within parish -

Marian spirituality is simple and should not be made complicated. It is good for prayer groups to do simple things: rosary and adoration, Mass and confession, and maternal activities in the parish. This way they will certainly not err or be dispersed. Marian groups must remain at a very tangible maternal level. They should be the "maternal cell" of the parish and take to the parish an authentic spirit of prayer from which is born concrete activity.

Through cultivating an authentic Marian spirituality, one also becomes active. It is not enough to sound the messages: one must know with love and love by knowing. A mother loves her sick child, but cannot operate on him if she is not competent in the field of medicine. It is also a little dangerous for a doctor to operate who does not put love into practice. The same with groups who limit themselves to knowing the messages, but do not put love into practice, and do not create the conditions for peace. Though they may take refuge in prayer, if they do not do anything concrete in the parish, they are not setting a good example. They must be active, while being inspired by prayer, otherwise they are removed from reality. Prayer - Naturally, to build peace it is necessary to cultivate a profound spirit of prayer while trying to find more time for a personal meeting with God. Many repeatedly say that there is no time for prayer, but this is like accusing God of having created too short a day. If they were to obtain from God a 25-hour day, nothing would surely change: they would continue not praying.

Fasting - Another fundamental element in teaching peace and creating the conditions for peace is fasting. Fasting invites us to open our eyes upon what we have and be satisfied, otherwise we are tempted to want even more and be always unsatisfied. Today's consumerism is far more dangerous than Communism because it is so deceptive.

It would be good to do as Our Lady asks and fast twice weekly, possibly on bread and water, on Wednesdays and Fridays. It is not good though to be too rigid about this: I mean when we are in the company of other people, or in voyage, or in a hotel or at a party, it might be inopportune to fast [as one normally does and so may decide to fast as best one can]. Then, together with the ordinary fast in our homes, there is also fasting from the TV, certain literature, curiosity, cigarettes and alcoholic drinks, etc. Let us not forget that fasting is good for the body, the soul and the spirit. With time, fasting chains up the passions which otherwise seduce us.

Church history teaches that thousands of mystics have experienced this. It is not true either that fasting makes us nervous, but rather that it uncovers our nervousness. Through fasting we are gradually purified, especially of our pride and egoism. In fact, fasting opens our eyes upon what is negative in us, and it is better for us to discover our spiritual ailments early because the later it is, the more difficult it is for us to conquer them.

Fasting is also a recommended practice in the Orthodox Church on Wednesdays and Fridays and is taken very seriously. The same with other religions, such as Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Also part of the Pope's programme -

Building the conditions for peace means also making efforts to spread a new "culture of life," the new civilization of love. In his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, the Holy Father, after having noted the disparity between the powerful resources available to the forces promoting "the culture of death" and the means at the disposal of those working for a "culture of life and love," exhorts all faithful to: rely on the help of God, for Whom nothing is impossible... Jesus Himself has shown us by His own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As He taught His disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on High will break down the walls of deceit: the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil

of practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love. (EV100)

The Pope, we see, is inviting us to break the walls around us with prayer and fasts. Our eyes can be opened onto the negative reality that surrounds us only when these means are used correctly. To the many who say they are waiting for the Pope to officially recognize Medjugorje and its messages before they begin praying and fasting we should say that their wait is useless since on various occasions the Pope has "recognized" the importance of prayer and fasting, and this encyclical is proof.

Do not wait for peace from without -

Our Lady speaks above all of peace in the heart. We should make it so that our inner peace is independent of our external environment. In fact, real peace should not depend on external events, but be fruit of inner freedom. The human soul cannot remain empty: if it is not filled with positive contents, it fills with negative ones. Thus, we cannot say we are growing spiritually if we do not become sensitive towards the life around us: this is a way to see if we have accepted properly the Marian spirituality. In paragraph 5 of *Evangelium vitae*, the Pope addresses a pressing appeal to each and every person, in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness! So, peace is present where life is respected; when this respect is lacking it means the beginning of destruction.

Two legs - Fasting and prayer are like two legs which for spiritual life are necessary not only to stay on your feet but also to walk ahead. Fasting and prayer are thus the real foundation upon which peace is built. To desire peace is good, but remains an empty wish when we do not want to pray and fast. Prayer united to fasting helps us carry out God's will. We call it a miracle when God accepts our will, i.e., when He grants us a grace asked with insistence, but the true miracle is when one accepts to do His will! (Angelo Masciello, Foggia)

FOUR CONCRETE STEPS for a spiritual journey

When we let God act in us and His programmes are able to develop, all which is exterior falls and becomes useless. It is a great call, but the road can be travelled only by those who journey in the heart, from within. There are some steps which must be taken in our spiritual life. Read Romans 10:9-13.

1. The first step in the spiritual journey is to recognize that God is the Master of everything. This is what we mean by fear of God. Unfortunately, we have lost the sense of reverential fear (awe) that made Moses prostrate himself before God in admiration and wonder. We are full of fear because we have not found the positive aspect of this awe which makes of us God's friends. Our fear, instead, causes negative interpretations and attitudes, for example regarding poverty, affliction and pain: fearing after having sinned instead of rejoicing for the Lord's forgiving love, fearing God's chastisement instead of exulting for His mercy, being sad instead of happy like Our Lady who did not worry about being poor. Reverential fear places a creature before his Creator with admiration and love and this makes him free. Contemplation of His greatness attracts and elevates.

2. The second step is to recognize that God is the Lord, Master of all situations. That which we express in the Creed must become an inner, concrete, tangible and lived-out act in the depth of our hearts. I experienced this personally when at one particular stage I could perceive barriers closing around me. There were many problems which I was unable to solve: people were against me, they were against God's plan for me (I felt certain about God's will for me). So what did I do? I said to God: You are the Lord, You are the Master. I give You myself and this situation. You fix it up for I can't be responsible for it anymore. I am ready for whatever You want of me. Do you want me to go to prison? So be it. Do You want something worse? So be it. I say nothing; I've offered myself, so I don't want to know how, when or where. You are the Lord, do according to Your will.

I placed myself in an attitude of total donation. I had left people, situations, every-thing, and in that moment I felt free; the problems were not weighing me down anymore. I began living and breathing again.

This is an attitude of adoration: God is God, what can I tell Him? Why should I condition Him? God is Lord, nothing of what I have is mine. I know that He is the master of all situations. He uses my past as if it were present; He uses the others because they are His; He uses everything for the perfect good. God can do it. This type of attitude means living free; fears, worries and curiosity all go. In our times people worry too much about when Jesus will come and from where. But what does it matter when or where? The important thing is that today He is master of myself, of my past and of my future. This opens our heart to the light and in this light we can begin our journey. Where you cannot see, the Lord sees for you, so that you can walk even in the dark because it is He Who leads you. It is beautiful to know that He can change everything in our past! It is with this attitude that our soul opens to God and together with St. Francis we can exclaim "My God and my Everything." In any other way we remain closed up in our errors, in the offences given and received, in our failures.

3. Permit God to lead you ahead in every situation. At times the soul feels what God wants, but it lacks trust, it doesn't want to move, it's lazy. One needs a "vivacious heart" to let the Lord's word and will become life in us. How many communities and groups experience wonderful things, but make no advances because they lack this vivacity, this generous response through which God can transform us, overriding our knowledge and our calculations! Unless our [limited] visions are overcome we remain in the dark. God is BEYOND all this.

This is precisely the reason for which Jesus did no miracles in His town: they were stuck in their own ideas and expectations. On the other hand, the act of faith is great and takes us to where we can't even imagine, but to where Jesus and Mary desire taking us if our attitude is one of total aperture. Inside of us the Spirit of God calls out: Abbà, Father! We must be united to Him even when we do not know how to pray. This means being open in the way of light, of knowledge of God. Without this opening; unless we give this possibility to the Spirit in us, all the meetings, the Scriptures, all that we have learned is nothing, we are unable to move.

The Scripture says: No one who believes in Him will be put to shame, and: Everyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved (Rm 10:11-13). This is the power of prayer! But we have yet to try it, precisely because we lack the presuppositions: recognizing God as God, and master of all situations. We have yet to experience it because we are closed up in our own ideas and ways of seeing things; we are still not free as the Scripture teaches us to be. This is why we must learn to be vivacious of heart, which is not to be confused with effusion of affection. This vivacity is freedom of spirit which makes us totally available and ready to whatever the Spirit may ask of us and it fills us with joyful and live faith.

4. Then one arrives at perfect love. What remains is faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love

(1Co 13). To see the way open right to the end, all we have at our disposal is pure love. When we are with God, we are one with Him, His strength comes into us and His current of life passes through us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Neither death, nor persecutions, nor famine, nor sword... In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (cf. Rm 8:31-39). You see, the heart of all this is the aperture which receives this love which exists in you and for you in whatever condition you may be in. When you are open to this love you are already filled [with it]; when we are in this love also the extraordinary gifts find their right place, for we arrive at a point of total clarity. First, though, it is necessary to arrive at the darkness and lose all the rest, otherwise this pure love is unable to become manifest. No teacher, nor prayer meeting, nor book can help us if we do not first put these things into practice. I invite you to live these steps in freedom and be thus able to help the Church and the world.

(Fr. Tomislav Vlasic)

ANNOUNCING THE TRUTH TODAY

eternal truth

faithful to the Scriptures

Starting from God's love revealed in Christ - So what characterizes this new evangelization, where Christianity appears more clearly as faith? Without a doubt a theocentric turn (having God as central) with respect to the anthropocentric one (having man as central) hoped for by many today. This means greater fidelity to the radical and impassioned biblical theocentrism where God is the Holy One, I am, and all is done so that God may be glorified.

How can theocentrism be recovered in a correct and authentic Christian manner? The reply is simple: following the Bible more faithfully, in particular, the essential contents of the Gospel message. Thus, we must start from here; the rest depends on a good start.

It would not be the same if instead of starting from the mystery of God's love in Christ we started from the existence of the spirit, or of the soul, or even of God as the most perfect being (things which no one doubts and which, with time, surface on their own for clarification). Only through showing how the glory of God shines in the face of Christ (2 Co 4:6) can we adequately say how God is: our God, the living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Already from here [we see that] our God has "no other god" similar to Him. The contents of Christianity become inaccessible if one does not pass through this door. From this God - manifested in the old Covenant - one arrives at Christ, the Word of God made flesh who died for our salvation, to then arrive at our eternal election in Him before the creation of the world. In the light of this truth consideration is then made of the creation, the gift of the Spirit, Christ's definite revelation, and His return at the end of time to complete the work of salvation.

Now it is only at this point that God manifests Himself in us (in the amount we are able to know Him) as He Who loves us to the point of giving His son Jesus to die on the cross and as He Who seeks eternal nuptial communion with us.

It is from here that all Christian ethics are generated. In fact, since God is man's every-thing, it should be natural that we consider Him our everything and that He should expect everything from us. He does not impose Himself in an external sense like a despot, but captures us with His love: For the love of Christ

controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (cf. 2Co 5:14). It's all here, but from this we see that the Christian faith and Christian ethics (in their unmistakable novelty and specificity) remain united one to the other in a unity which cannot be dissociated.

Examples of renewed contents in evangelization

1. Announce more intensely a personal God, the personality of Whom is drawn from the Holy Scriptures, while at the same time distancing ourselves from preaching too much class-room theology. In fact, when insistence is made only on the metaphysical perfection of "God, one and absolute" this can make Him appear bloodless, lifeless, immobile and so different to the "living God" of the Scriptures who is close to us (For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us? Dt 4:7); a God who gets angry and repents, who loves and rejoices, who seeks and waits, who calls and stretches out His arms to us because He is Father. He is the Emmanuel, the God with us, who even comes to live in us (We will come to him and make our home with him - Jn 14:23).

This is necessary for the West where there is still a deist predominance, i.e., an idea of divinity based on human reason and not on revelation: a divinity which can be accepted by all, like a vague horizon of man's existence and knowledge, but to which a personal name cannot be given, and the other side of which is totally dark. It is also necessary for the East where there is a growing feeling of a neutral divinity.

2. With more intensity, Jesus Christ is also to be announced in His mystery as the Lord who gives life and resurrection, as the Lord of man and history, drawing from the Fathers and the great Councils. The prevalent teaching methods of today seem to stop at His redemptive mission, and His philanthropic love. Only intense positive preaching of Christ the Lord can stand up to the ideologies in the west where Christ is being announced as a protester and prophet in the ideological sense; and in the east where Christ is known and venerated by many hindus only as a teacher of wisdom and a model of disinterested love - eg. Ghandi's impoverished interpretation shared by so many even in our world.

3. The Holy Spirit also must be more intensely announced in His importance, drawing on the great patristic and mediaeval theology. The discourse on grace as a created entity often darkens the fact that the Spirit Himself who lives in us is our communion with God. Not only is He a source of gift, but when possessed by the regenerated soul (which becomes with Him a single spirit), He is the supreme "gift" of deification.

It truly is distressing how the Spirit is often reduced in the western world to an "anti-institutional and corrective element" of the dogmatic and structural rigidity of the Latin Church. The supernatural elevation of man through the Spirit who lives in him, can indeed respond to the spiritual needs of the eastern world which aspires to the highest of mystical experiences.

4. Man too is to be more intensely announced in his historic and salvific dimension, following the spiritual lines of incomparable depth of St. Augustine, for example. It urgently needs doing today, undermined as we are by fear of the supernatural on our way down the slope of the naturalistic flat (so cold and despairing) which made a popular theologian write: "Let's say it: who is interested in 'becoming God' today?" But this extinguishes in the heart of man all his desires of communion with God and of true happiness.

In the West there is an odd coexistence of two contradictory ideas regarding man: on one part he is reduced to an insignificant being; on the other part he is emphasized in his historical and psychological aspect. Instead in the East, man dissolves into the ocean of the impersonal Being, to be eternally

forgotten by the others and himself. Christianity, on the other hand, has much to say about man, with an appearance of particular newness, in a realism full of hope and in a hope full of truth.

5. Concerning the Sacraments, faith in their effectiveness is greatly diminished, both for the negative influence of the anti-sacramentalism stemming from Calvinism, and for the general scepticism for that which cannot be seen or which is seen as nothing more than a rite. Recovering this faith is possible through reading and comprehending anew the wonderful liturgical texts of the Church which explain the rites.

6. Concerning Ecclesiology, it's time for the attack. We cannot remain for ever on the defence, trying to justify the Church in her political choices and her present position in the world. Without playing down the importance of the hierarchical institution of the Church desired by the Lord, the man of today must be invited to look deeper upon what the world does not know and cannot see.

Fr. Umberto Neri (reduced and adapted from the original)

The two Churches in China move towards reconciliation

Ten million Catholics in China: little more than a mustard seed in a population of over one billion which the government tries to control by limiting the birth rate to 1 child per couple and by practically eliminating the frail or handicapped children in orphanages.

The Catholics have at their disposition 4,500 churches and chapels. Every year 50,000 adults ask to be baptized. In charge of the 115 dioceses and the 1,400 priests are an imprecise number of "clandestine" Bishops (with unregistered priests, faithful and places of worship) and 71 "official" Bishops whose ordainment is valid in nearly every case. Most of these also recognize the Pope's primacy and prayers are said for him in all the churches. Whether a Catholic in China belongs to one group or the other depends on the amount of tolerance by local authorities. All Catholics are faithful to the Pope, unlike we "western" folk who are put to shame by these.

The Holy See is working for the reconciliation of the two Churches. In some cases they ignore one another, however, there is a certain amount of collaboration; the 31 seminaries are full and accept young men from either Church; also the 40 convents are crowded by most of China's 3,000 nuns.

We pray that the sufferings of the many Chinese martyrs may become seed of unity.

Peace difficult in former Yugoslavia

The peace imposed by Dayton onto the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, after four years of ethnic cleansing and massacres and a split-up along unnatural borders, was quick to crack: shooting continues in Sarajevo, the Serbs are abandoning the capital, circulation is difficult in Bosnia, tension among the Croatian Muslims in Mostar and elsewhere; plus the news of the horrible massacres to the male Muslim population by Karadzic and Mladic and the like. But the protectors of Serbia do not want to hand over the war criminals! The US representative of the peace plan summoned the Presidents of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia to Rome to make them respect the commitments taken 3 months ago. The outcome of the

meeting is not known.

The Pope's "thoughts and prayers are turned to those peoples who are still living in the expectation of more dignified living conditions. Let us pray to God to inspire in the senior political leaders gathered in Rome courageous initiatives and actions in order to achieve once and for all a civil peace based on justice." It takes a conversion of heart to produce courageous initiatives and actions, with the exclusion of personal interests and diplomatic games!

OUR READERS WRITE

A reasonable proposal - While we were reflecting on the need to lengthen thanksgiving after Communion to at least 10 minutes (Echo 124), a proposal was being sent to the Holy Congregation for the Sacraments to guarantee the same thing: adequate thanks-giving. It says: Communion be given immediately after the Consecration with eventual modifications to the text. The time remaining till the end of the Mass would allow for the faithful to be united to the thanksgiving prayer to Jesus, to His priestly prayer and to the Lord's Prayer. It has also been suggested that the sign of peace be moved forward to the moment prior to the offertory, as Jesus suggests in His Gospel and which is already part of the Ambrosian practice, where it would disturb less the atmosphere of prayerful concentration prior to Communion.

Take the Mass seriously. The visionaries confirm a message regarding Mass given by the Virgin to Marija during Lent of 1984, i.e., prior to the weekly (then monthly) messages. This is what it says: "Dear children, Try to arrive in church a little before the beginning of Mass so that you can prepare your hearts to receive Jesus. And after the Mass remain a little to speak with Him instead of rushing out straight away as you now do. God could then do more miracles in your lives and there would be less sick people among you." (S.E.)

Many send in messages concerning various apparitions asking us to publish them. We thank these people for their trust in Echo. Nonetheless, the scope of our little bulletin is to publish the Medjugorje message and to orient as much as possible our readers to the life of the Church by keeping them informed of events and problems which regard it, and to give them the Word of God which the messages repeat; that Word which is found in the Holy Scriptures, and which is faithfully echoed in the Magisterium of the Pastor who guides the Church.

The Pilgrim Virgin of France was in our home for eight days, after five months of travelling. At the moment it is snowing, so it is not possible to continue, though for Our Lady, it has been winter on the earth for many years and She cannot rest until She has warmed people's hearts. As we work we sing and pray and praise God for this grace; we feel so spoiled by Her warm embrace! What a grace to have a Mother who unites us to the Holy Trinity!" (Colette and Jean-Marie Evrat, Dole, France)

To a discouraged priest who "sees no results after all his effort and organization": It is a grace to recognize that "without me you can do nothing," so you may mend your ways. How sad, to see that our churches have been infected with all that "doing," with the novelties and programmes instead of concentrating on the Donor of all things. God wants you to be a priest "who knows only Christ, and Christ crucified," whose only aim is to announce the testimony of God, not what we know, but what God has made us know and what He has worked in us, that your words may not be in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power of God (cf. 1Cor 2:1-5).

For this is needed a revolution of the Copernican type, i.e., no longer shall my person be central, but Jesus the Lord of all. No longer shall my work be central, but His. If you live while leaning on Him

alone, you will see "signs which accompany those who believe" (Mk 16:17). Of course, you shall have to give Him your best time to dedicate to prayer, subtracting it from the time you spend on jobs, hobbies or meetings, so that He alone is the Lord of your life. Then we too will "go everywhere while He works with us and confirms the message with signs that attend it" (Mk 16:20). Have courage then: "did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" Change your place of departure and your direction and everything will run smoothly. You will not even need the apparent success or human approval because Jesus Himself will be your success and He will give to you all that you need and much more.

A young helper writes: "Being able to distribute Echo in its various languages in Medj. during the summer (and the Christmas and Easter holidays) was the best gift I have ever received. It was such a joy. To favour its distribution in the world I offer to Mary my hours of study and the difficult moments of my day." (Maria V.)

* I was able to return to Medjugorje recently and was thankful to refuel the flame of the message which is kept alive by your bulletin. J. Farrell, Scotland.

* The Echo is the acorn which is becoming the great oak - a spiritual treasure - easy to read and very instructive. (Sr. M.M., Dublin)

* Thank you for Echo; already we are deriving so much spiritual rejuvenation and fresh determination to live on our Gospa's messages. (Friends of Medj. group, Lesotho). Thank you, Evelyn, for the photos and letter.

* Much thanks for the Echo; be assured of my prayers. (Fr. S. Ryle, Japan)

Let us accept Mary's invitation and the grace of Jesus for a true conversion which will strip us of our vices, making us able to enter into brotherly communion with all.

Be blessed now and always.

Villanova, 26 Feb. 1996

Don Angelo

Open your hearts to God like flowers in spring yearning for the sun