Text of Pope Paul's Encyclical on The Church in Modern World

This is the second of three installments of the full text of Pope Paul's encyclical 'Ecclesiam Suam' as released by NCWC News Service. The first portion discussed the need for Catholics to have an increased awareness of what the Church must be in the modern world. The concluding portion of that section and the entire second section of the encyclical is printed here.

Church Enriched

The interior life still remains the great source of the Church's spirituality, her own proper way of receiving the illuminations of the Spirit of Christ, the nourishment and sympathetic manifestation of her religious and moral activity, an impregnable defense as well as an inexhaustible source of energy in her difficult contacts with this world.

It is necessary to restore to Holy Baptism, that is to the fact of having been incorporated by means of this sacrament into the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, all of its significance. It is specially important that the baptismal person should have a highly conscious system of his elevation, or rather, of his return to the most happy reality of being an adopted son of God, to the dignity of being a brother of Christ, to the good fortune We mean by the grace and joy of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to the vocation to a new life. It has lost nothing human save only the unhappy fate of original sin and, because it is human, is capable of the finest manifestations and the most precious and sublime acts.

To be Christians, to have received Holy Baptism, must not be looked upon as something indifferent or of little importance, but it must be imprinted deeply and happily in the consciences of every baptized person. He must truly look upon it, as did the Christians of old, as an "illumination," which, by drawing down upon him the life-giving ray of divine Truth, opens heaven to him, sheds light upon earthly life and enables him to walk as a child of the light towards the vision of God, the spring of eternal happiness.

It is easy to see what practical program this consideration imposes on us and our ministry. We are happy to see that this program is already being put into practice throughout the whole Church and that it is being furthered with prudent and ardent zeal. We encourage this activity, we command it, We bless it.

2—Renewal

We are taken up by the desire to see the Church of God become what Christ wills her to be, one, holy, and entirely dedicated to the pursuit of perfection to which she is effectively called. Perfect as she is in the ideal conception of her Divine Founder, the Church should tend towards becoming perfect in the real expression of her earthly existence . . . This is the great moral problem which is uppermost in the life of the Church, a problem which reveals what she is, stimulates her, accuses her, and sustains her.

This search for perfection fills her with groanings and prayers, with repentance and hope, with strength and confidence, with responsibility and merits. It is a problem inherent in those theological realities which give meaning to our human life.

Without reference to the teachings of Christ and to the magisterium of the Church it is impossible to pass judgment on man. We cannot judge his nature, his primeval perfection, the ruinous consequences of original sin, man's capacities for good, his need for help to desire and achieve what is good, the meaning of the present life and his final end. We cannot judge those values which man desires or controls, the criterion of perfection and sanctity, and means and ways of enriching life with the highest dignity and fullness.

The Ways of Christ

A strong desire to know the ways of Christ is and ought to remain ever present in the Church, and its discussion must always be fruitful and varied. As regards the questions having to do with perfection, fresh nourishment is provided in the Church from century to century. We should therefore like to see the unique interest which the life of Christ deserves reawakened, not so much for the sake of elaborating new theories as for generating new energies. They should be used for acquiring that sanctity which Christ teaches, His example, His word, His grace, and His method sustained by ecclesiastical tradition, strengthened by divine action and exemplified in the lives of the saints make it possible for us to know, desire and to follow the path of sanctity.

In the pursuit of spiritual and moral perfection the Church receives an exterior stimulus from the conditions in which she lives. She cannot remain unaffected by or indifferent to the changes that take place in the world around.

This world exerts its influence on the Church in a thousand ways and places conditions on her daily conduct. The Church, as everyone knows, is not separated from the world, but lives in it. Hence, the members of the Church are subject to its influence, they breathe its culture, accept its laws and absorb its customs.

This imminent contact of the Church with temporal society continually creates for her a problematic situation, which today has become extremely difficult. On the one hand Christian life, as defended and promoted by the Church, must always take great care lest it should be deceived, profaned or stifled as it must strive to render itself immune from the contagion of error and of evil.

Urgency of Present

On the other hand, Christian life should not only be adapted to the forms of thought and custom which the temporal environment offers and imposes on her, provided they are compatible with the basic exigencies of her religious and moral program, but it should also try to draw close to them, to purify them, to ennoble them, to vivify and to sanctify them. This task demands of the Church a perennial examination of her moral vigilance, which our times demand with particular urgency and exceptional seriousness.

Also from this point of view the celebration of the council is providential. The pastoral character which it has assumed, the practical objectives of renewing canonical discipline, the desire to make the practice of Christian life as easy as possible in conformity with its supernatural character — all these factors confer on the council an especial merit even at this moment when we are still awaiting the major part of its deliberations.

In fact it awakens in pastors as well as in the faithful the desire to preserve and increase in Christian life its character of supernatural authenticity and reminds all of their duty of effectively and deeply imprinting that character in their own personal conduct, thus leading the weak to be good, the good to be better, the better to be generous, and the generous to be holy. It gives rise to new expressions of sanctity, urges love to be genial, and evokes fresh outpourings of virtue and Christian heroism.

Naturally, it will be for the council to suggest what reforms are to be introduced in the legislation of the Church. The post-conciliar commissions, especially the one instituted for the revision of Canon Law and already nominated by us will formulate in concrete terms the deliberations of the ecumenical synod.

However, it will be your task, venerable brothers, to indicate to us the means by which to render the face of our holy Church spotless and youthful.

But let our determination to bring about such a reform be once again made manifest. How many times in centuries past has this resolve been associated with the history of the councils, and so let it be, once more. But this time it is not to remove from the Church any specific heresies or general disorders, which, by the grace of God, do not exist within her today, but rather to infuse fresh spiritual vigor into the Mystical Body of Christ, insofar as it is a visible society, purifying it from the defects of many of its members and stimulating it to new virtue.

In order to be able to bring this about with divine help, let us place before you some preliminary considerations suited to facilitate the work of renewal and to instill into it the courage which it requires together with sacrifice, and to indicate here some broad outlines along which the reform could be better effected.

We should remember above all certain norms to guide us in this work of reform. The reform cannot concern either the essential conception of the Church or its basic structure. We would be putting the word reform to the wrong use if we were to employ it in that sense. We cannot attribute infidelity to this beloved and holy Church of God to which, as we believe, belongs the highest grace and from which rises up to our spirit the testimony "that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

Our Responsibility

Oh, it is neither pride nor presumption nor obstinacy nor folly but a luminous certitude and our joyous conviction that we are indeed living members of the Body of Christ, that we are the authentic heirs of the Gospel of Christ, those who truly continue the work of the Apostles. There dwells in us the great inheritance of truth and morality characterizing the Catholic Church, which today possesses intact the living heritage of the original apostolic tradition. If all this redounds to our glory, or to use a better expression, the reason for which we must "always give thanks to God" (Eph. 5:20), it also constitutes our responsibility before God Himself to whom we are accountable for so great a benefit and also before the Church, in which we must instill the firm desire and resolution to guard the "deposit" about which St. Paul speaks (I Tim. 6:20). We have a responsibility also before our brothers who are still separated from us, and before the entire world so that all share with us the gift of God.

Hence, if the term reform can be applied to this subject, it is not to be understood in the sense of change, but of a stronger determination to preserve the characteristic features which Christ has impressed on the Church.

We should rather always wish to lead her back to her perfect form corresponding, on the one hand, to her original design and on the other fully consistent with the necessary development which like a seed grown into a tree has given to the Church her legitimate and concrete form in history.

Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that the edifice of the Church which has now become large and majestic for the glory of God as His magnificent temple, should be reduced to its early minimal proportions as if they alone were true and good. Nor should we be fascinated by the desire of renewing the structure of the Church through the charismatic way as if that ecclesiastical expression were new and good which springs from particular ideas, zealous no doubt and sometimes even claiming their origin from divine inspiration, thus introducing an arbitrary scheme of artificial renewal in the very constitution of the Church.

We must serve the Church and love her as she is, with a clear understanding of history, and humbly searching for the will of God who assists and guides her even when at times He permits human weakness to eclipse the purity of her features and the beauty of her action. It is this purity and beauty which we are endeavoring to discover and promote.

Deepen Convictions

We must deepen within us these convictions if we are to avoid the other danger which the desire for reform can produce not only in its pastors, who are held back by a watchful sense of responsibility, but also in the many faithful who think that the reform of the Church should consist primarily in adapting its sentiments and habits to those of the world.

The fascination of worldly life today is very powerful indeed. Conformity appears to many as an inescapable and wise course. Those who are not well rooted in Faith and in the observance of ecclesiastical law easily think that the time has come for concessions to be made to secular norms of life, as if these were better and as if the Christian can and must make them his own.

This phenomenon of adaptation is noticeable in the philosophical field (how much fashion counts even in the world of thought, which ought to be autonomous and free and only avid and docile before truth and the authority of approved masters!), as well as in the practical field, where it is becoming more and more uncertain and difficult to point out the line of moral rectitude and right conduct.

Naturalism threatens to render null and void the original conception of Christianity. Relativism, which justifies everything and treats all things as of equal value, assails the absolute character of Christian principles. The tendency of throwing overboard every restraint and inconvenience from the conduct of life finds the discipline of Christian ascetism burdensome and futile.

Sometimes even the apostolic desire of approaching the secular milieu or of making oneself acceptable to modern mentality, especially that of youth, leads up to a rejection of the forms proper to Christian life and even of its very dignity, which must give meaning and strength to this eagerness for approach and educative influence. Is it not perhaps true that often the young clergy or indeed even some zealous Religious moved by the good intention of penetrating the masses or particular groups, tend to get mixed up with them instead of remaining apart, thus sacrificing the true efficacy of their apostolate to some sort of useless imitation?

The great principle enunciated by Christ presents itself again both in its actuality and in its difficulty. To be in the world, and not of the world. It is good for us even today to offer up that highest and most opportune prayer of Christ "who always lives and intercedes for us" (Heb. 7:25): "I am not asking that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them clear of what is evil" (Jn. 17:15).

'Aggiornamento'

However it is not our intention to say that perfection consists in remaining changeless as regards external forms which the Church through many centuries has assumed. Nor does it consist in being stubbornly opposed to those new forms and habits which are commonly regarded as acceptable and suited to the character of our times.

The word aggiornamento, rendered famous by our predecessor of happy memory, John XXIII, should always be kept in mind as our program of action. We have confirmed it as the guiding criterion of the ecumenical council. We want to recall it to mind as a stimulus to preserve the perennial vitality of the Church, her continuous awareness and ability to study the signs of the times and her constantly youthful agility in "scrutinizing it all carefully and retaining only what is good" (I Th. 5:21) always and everywhere.

But let us repeat it once again for our common admonition and profit: the Church will rediscover her renewed youthfulness not so much by changing her exterior laws as by interiorly assimilating her true spirit of obedience to Christ and accordingly by observing those laws which the Church prescribes for herself with the intention of following Christ.

Here is the secret of her renewal, here her "metanoia," here her exercise of perfection. Even though the Church's law might be made easier to observe by the simplification of some of its precepts and by placing confidence in the liberty of the modern Christian, with his greater knowledge of his duties and his greater maturity and wisdom in choosing the means to fulfill them, the law, nevertheless, retains its essential binding force.

The Christian life, which the Church interprets and sets down in wise regulations, will always require faithfulness, effort, mortification and sacrifice; it will always bear the mark of the "narrow way" of which our Lord speaks to us (cf. Matt. 7, 13 ss.); it will require not less moral energy of us modern Christians than it did of Christians in the past. But perhaps more. It will call for a prompt obedience, no less binding today than in the past, that will be, perhaps, more difficult, and certainly more meritorious in that it is guided more by supernatural motives than natural ones.

It is not conformity to the spirit of the world, not immunity from the discipline of reasonable asceticism, not indifference to the laxity of modern behavior, not emancipation from the authority of prudent and lawful superiors, not apathy with regard to the contradictory forms of modern thought, that can give vigor to the Church, or make her fit to receive the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or render her following of Christ more genuine, or give her the anxious yearning of fraternal charity and the ability to communicate her message. These things come from her aptitude to live according to divine grace, her faithfulness to the Gospel of the Lord, her hierarchical and communal unity. The Christian is not soft and cowardly, he is strong and faithful.

We realize how long this letter would be if we were to indicate even the main lines of the modern program of the Christian life, and we do not intend to enter into such an undertaking now. You, moreover, know what the moral needs of our time are, and you will not cease to call the faithful to an understanding of the dignity, purity and austerity of the Christian life, nor will you fail to denounce, as best you can, and even publicly, the moral dangers and vices from which our age is suffering.

We all remember the solemn exhortations which Holy Scripture addresses to us: "I know of all thy doings, all thy toil and endurance; how little patience thou hast with wickedness (Apoc. 2:2) and all of us will strive to be watchful and diligent pastors. The council is to give to us, too, new and salutary instructions, and all of us must certainly prepare ourselves now to hear them and carry them out.

Spirit of Poverty

But we do not wish to forego commenting briefly on two points, which we consider to concern principal needs and duties and which can provide matter for reflection on the general lines of the renewal of ecclesiastical life.

We refer first of all to the spirit of poverty. We consider that it was so proclaimed in the holy Gospel, that it is so much a part of the plan of our destination to the Kingdom of God. It is so much in danger because of the great store the modern mind sets by possessions, that it is necessary to help us to understand to many of our weaknesses and failures in the past and to show us what our way of life should be and what is the best way to announce the religion of Christ to souls. And, finally, it is so difficult to practice it as we ought, that we presume to mention it explicitly in this our message. We do this, not because we have the intention of issuing special canonical regulations on the subject, but rather to ask of you, venerable brethren, the comfort of your agreement, your counsel and your example.

We look to you as the authoritative voice which interprets the better impulses by which the Spirit of Christ manifests itself in the Church, to tell us how pastors and people ought to adapt their language and conduct to poverty today. As the Apostle admonishes us, "Yours is to be the same mind which Christ Jesus showed" (Phil. 2:5). We look to you to say how we should, together, propose for the life of the Church those directives which must base our confidence more upon the help of God and the goods of the spirit than upon temporal means. These must remind us, and teach the world, that spiritual goods take precedence over economic goods, and that we should limit and subordinate the possession and use of the latter insofar as they are useful for the right exercise of our apostolic mission.

The brevity of this allusion to the nobility and necessity of the spirit of poverty which characterizes the Gospel of Christ, does not exempt us from our duty of remarking that this spirit does not prevent us from understanding and making lawful use of economic reality. This has assumed an enormous and far-reaching importance in the development of modern civilization, particularly in its consequences for society. We consider, indeed, that the inner freedom which is derived from the spirit of evangelical poverty makes us more sensitive to, and more capable of understanding the human aspects of economic questions, by applying to wealth and to the progress it can effect the just and often severe standard of judgment that they require, by giving to indigence our most solicitous and generous attention, and finally, by expressing the wish that economic goods be not the source of conflicts, of selfishness and of pride among men, but that they be used in justice and equity for the common good and, accordingly, distributed with greater foresight.

Whatever concerns these economic goods — goods inferior to those that are spiritual and eternal, but necessary in this present life — find in the man who has studied the Gospel the capacity needed to form a wise scale of values and to cooperate in projects beneficial to mankind. Science, technology and, particularly, labor become the object of our keenest interest. The bread which they produce becomes sacred for table and for altar.

The social teachings of the Church leave no doubt on this subject, and we are pleased to take this opportunity of reaffirming our close adherence to such salutary teachings.

Spirit of Charity

The other point we should like to mention is that of the spirit of charity. But is not this subject already in the forefront of your minds? Is not charity the focal point of the religious economy of the Old Testament and the New? Is it not to charity that the progress of spiritual experience in the Church leads? May it not be that charity is the ever more illuminating and joyful discovery that theology, on the one hand, and piety, on the other, are making in the never-ending meditation on the scriptural and sacramental treasures of which the Church is heir, guardian, mistress and dispenser?

We consider, with our predecessors, with the bright company of saints which our age has given to the Church on earth and in heaven, and with the devout instinct of the faithful, that charity should assume today its rightful position, that is, the first and the highest, in the scale of religious and moral values. Not only should this be in theoretical estimation, but also by being put into practice in the Christian life. Let this be so of the charity towards God, which His charity poured out upon us, and true also of the charity which in return we should display towards our neighbors, that is to say, the human race. Charity explains all things. Charity inspires all things. Charity makes all things possible. Charity renews all things. Charity "sustains, believes, hopes, endures to the last" (I Cor. 13:7). Who is there among us who does not know these things? And, if we know them, is not this, perhaps, the hour of charity?

Our Lady

This vision of humble and profound Christian perfection leads our thoughts to Mary most holy, for she reflects this vision most perfectly and wonderfully in herself; she lived it on earth and now in heaven she rejoices in its glory and beatitude. Devotion to Mary is happily flourishing in the Church today; and we, on this occasion, gladly turn our thoughts to her to admire in the Blessed Virgin, mother of Christ (and therefore, the mother of God and the mother of us) the model of Christian perfection, the mirror of true virtues, the pride of true humanity.

We regard devotion to Mary as a source of Gospel teaching. In our pilgrimage to the Holy Land we wished to learn the lesson of real Christianity from her, the most blessed, lovable, humble and immaculate creature, whose privilege it was to give to the Word of God human flesh in its pristine and innocent beauty. To her now we turn our imploring gaze as to a loving mistress of life, while we discuss with you, venerable brethren, the spiritual and moral regeneration of the life of Holy Church.

(To be continued next week)

Red Press Ignores Criticisms

Vienna—(NC)— Most communist propaganda agencies have ignored the criticism of communism contained in the new encyclical of Pope Paul VI.

The reactions of communist countries on the encyclical, Ecclesian Suam, have been marked by an attitude of reserved judgement. Until now, no attack has appeared against the Pope or the Vatican in connection with the encyclical's condemnation of atheistic communism.

Radio stations and news agencies in Moscow, Prague and Budapest tried to diminish the importance of Pope Paul's first encyclical. The Soviet Union's national news agency, Tass, stressed that the encyclical condemns preventive and aggressive war and rivalries. Tass quoted without comment the encyclical's passage condemning atheistic communism.

Europe Press Favorable On Letter

London — (NC) — Pope Paul VI's first encyclical letter, Ecclesiam Suam, brought immediate and generally favorable comment from newspapers throughout Europe's non-Communist countries.

The Italian press, which gave considerable prominence to the far-reaching, 15,000-word document, praised it for strongly reflecting the "opening to the world" on the part of the Catholic Church.

La Stampa, independent Turin daily, said "the world receives a message necessary for its salvation. The offer is repeated now, but under a new form of an invitation to the dialogue."

A Rome daily, Il Tempo, stressed that the encyclical "contains an outstanding point of view of the Catholic way of thinking." It also hailed the encyclical for what it said was a "new and clear-cut statement of the Church's attitude against atheistic communism."

Swiss newspapers commented especially on the Pope's references to the Catholic Church's dialogue with the "separated brethren," saying that the encyclical revives hopes for its success.

In Belgium, leading newspapers praised Ecclesiam Suam as manifesting "the same ecumenical mind that was incarnated in Pope John XXIII."

Dutch newspapers called special attention to the Catholic Church's spirit of self-criticism reflected in the encyclical. They noted with satisfaction "a coincidence between the pontiff's thoughts and that of the hierarchy of the Netherlands." The papers said Ecclesiam Suam "responds to the present needs of the entire world, even the non-Christian one."

God's World

The Peace-keepers

By REV. LEO J. TRESE

"Blessed are the peacemakers," said our Lord, "for they shall be called the children of God." This being true, then it is doubly true that "Blessed are the peacekeepers."

It is a great act of charity to resolve the quarrels of others and to reconcile antagonists. It is an even greater act of charity to refrain from instigating a quarrel ourselves.

There are three basic skills needed by those who would fulfill the role of peacekeeper and thus rejoice the heart of Christ. These skills are valuable in all our interpersonal relationships. They are particularly needed by husbands and wives if a marriage is to be happy and the home is to be a haven of peace.

The three skills may be described as (1) the ability to allow another person to make a mistake without feeling personally affronted by by his lapse; (2) the ability to admit one's own mistakes quite frankly without feeling a need to justify oneself; and (3) the ability to be right and still be silent. This third one is the most important of all.

At first sight these seem very simple skills which anyone might easily acquire and practice. The simplicity, however, is deceptive, because these three aptitudes run counter to the deep-seated pride and vanity with which Original Sin has endowed us. Moreover, there seems to be in al lof us a streak of sadism. Like the naughty boy who enjoys pulling the legs off from housefiles, we seem to get pleasure from catching someone in a mistake and then making him squirm for his blunder.

Let us look in on a peace-loving couple. The husband, inspecting the family checkbook, finds that his wife has balanced the book wrongly. It is asking to much of human nature to expect the husband to say nothing and simply to correct the error. However, he is content to remark, in a normal tone of voice, "I see you've made a mistake in subtraction here." The wife, in turn, is content to answer, "I'm sorry, dear. I'll have to be more careful." How much better this, than the following interchange.

Husband: "When will you ever learn arithmetic? I've told you a dozen times to check your figures carefully. You shouldn't be trusted with a checkbook at all." Wife: "If you had to look after five children with the baby crying and the phone ringing and someone at the door, you'd make mistakes too, Mr. Einstein." The battle is on.

Again, the husband returns from the supermarket lacking one item on the shopping list. The wife is too human to remain wholly silent but she says only, "You forget the butter, but we can get along without it." The husband answers, "Sorry, sweetheart; don't know how I missed it." The wife could have said, with an air of deep injury, "You always forget something! How do you expect me to get meals when I don't have what I need?" The husband could have shouted, "Next time go yourself!" Peace would be shattered again.

Arguments can begin over such trivial disagreements as to whether it was four weeks ago or six that Mother was here to dinner; whether it is a Buick or a Mercury that the Joneses drive; whether husband promised to clean up the basement this Saturday or said he would do it as soon as he could

Any time that you find yourself on the verge of a dispute, just ask yourself, "Does it matter that much? Does it matter enough to precipitate an argument?" Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the answer will be, "No!" If you can be honest enough to give yourself that answer, the argument will fade as quickly as though you had flicked a switch.

The other person's mistake may have annoyed you but it will not bring the world to an end. There is no need to rub his nose in his stupidity. The other person's wrong opinion will not change the course of history; let him think that red is blue if he insists. Your own stature as a person is not diminished because someone has questioned your wisdom. You are just as right, remaining silent, as you are when shouting for vindication — and you are much more charitable, much more pleasing to the Prince of Peace.