

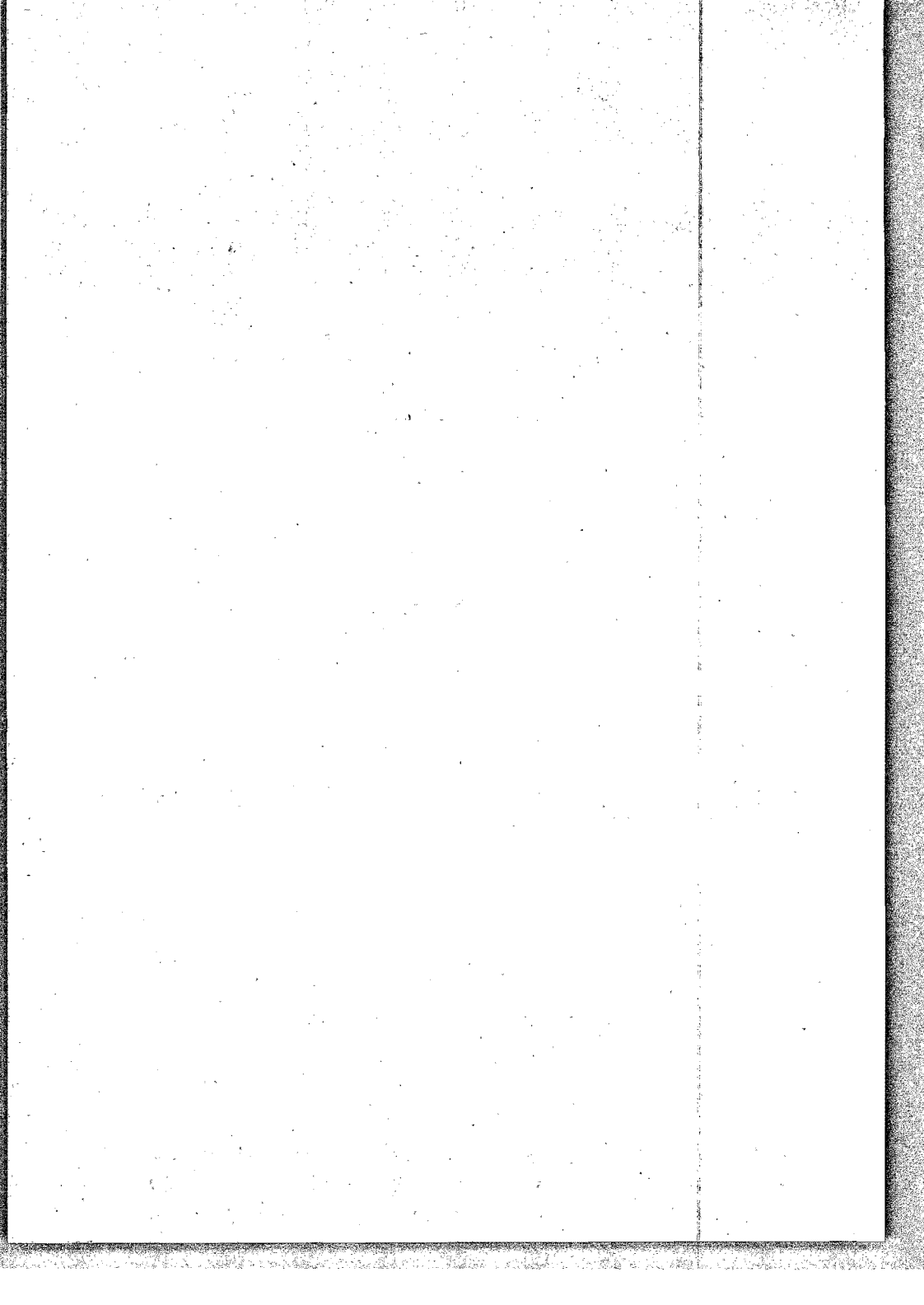


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Archbishop of Milan

CHRISTIAN FORMATION ACCORDING TO THE GOSPELS

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FOREWORD

At the Rome CLC Secretariate we are delighted to be able to present these conferences of Archbishop Carlo Martini in our Progressio Supplement. Father Martini was the former Rector of the Gregorian University (Rome), till he was nominated Archbishop of Milan last December. Before he went to the Gregorian University, he was the Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome), and it is a tribute to the Archbishop that he still is - not was - an authority on the Scriptures, as he continues to give weekly talks on the Bible to his Archdiocese, on the Radio and Television.

Obviously, the work of someone of the Archbishop's standing needs no endorsement from us in the CLC's; nevertheless, from our point of view, it is most confirming to see that his approach to the 4 Gospels - especially his analysis of Mark as the first gospel of Christian initiation - corresponds exactly with the formation experience of many of our CLC's. We hope that our enthusiasm for this Supplement of Progressio will be shared by many in our CLC's, especially those engaged in formation.

One of the great merits of these conferences is that they open up for us the living reality of the Scriptures, and the Sacraments. As Christians, we are a community formed by the Word and Signs of God. What makes any community is a common language and symbols (or signs). There is no such thing as a private language - or at least, there are special places for people who think there is; they are so self-contained, in speaking only to themselves, that they have to be looked after by others for the rest of their

lives. What makes us Christians a community is a common language - the Word of God - and the Signs of His enduring Presence amongst us - the Sacraments. Christ - the Universal Smile, as Teilhard calls Him - is continually present to us through Word and Sacrament. It is one thing to 'know' this; it is another thing to experience this "Smile", or, as the Archbishop puts it, 'to pass from the outside to the centre'. Hence the importance of christian initiation and formation.

The different stages of prayer that the Archbishop speaks about should prove most helpful for all of us. The way we relate with one another - the things we talk about, the way we speak to one another - are an authentic reflection on how we stand before God. If we have difficulty in describing how we pray, it is just as instructive to reflect on how we talk to other people - do we listen? are we open to changing our opinions? how often do we ask for pardon? or help?

The relation that the Archbishop develops between the various stages of christian initiation, and the services appropriate to each stage, should be of special interest to us, given our present strong emphasis on Mission and Service.

Another aspect of these conferences that may appeal to us is their stress on the importance of personal experience, and the need for reflection on it. From the point of view of our groups, it is obvious what a significant aspect of their meetings the exchange of personal experiences should be.

One final point, which also comes at the end of the Archbishop's reflections - the Spirit always gives us time. "The fullness of time" is a frequent scriptural refrain; its full meaning may be rather mysterious, but at least it tells us that God is not in a hurry: everything, everyone is in His hands. This should be a consoling thought for us who feel the pressure of time - we can afford to take our time, even when it is question of our own CLC formation.

Patrick O'SULLIVAN S.J.

I would like to approach this theme against the background of the last Synod on Catechesis, for this Synod highlighted - for all of us in the Church - the necessity of a systematic and continuing Christian formation. Such a formation is by no means limited to children and their First Communion; on the contrary, it embraces the whole range of the Christian experience from preparation for Baptism to Christian maturity.

But at what stage do we attain this maturity?

According to Vergote, a psychologist from the University of Louvain, this does not happen before the age of 30. Socially, of course, we presume that when a person is 18 or 20, he/she assumes civic rights and duties, but religious maturity is reached later.

If we keep this claim in mind - without entering into a debate about it - it certainly has a bearing on what the last Synod said in relation to the need for a systematic and progressive Christian formation, till Christian maturity is attained. And when that occurs, it must of course coincide with psychological maturity and a coherent view of life.

So, my first point of reference here is the Synod and what the Bishops said.

My second point of reference is the Basic Christian Communities and the different experiences of Christian initiation that many of them have developed in recent years.

Everyone - even those people who at first sight appear most free - experiences the need to go through the various stages of initiation, instruction and formation; at least that is the way it seems to me.

My third point of reference is my own experience - the difficulty I have had in the course of my life in seriously moving into the fields of Philosophy and Theology. I have experienced this difficulty quite deeply. These studies did not become a part of me, as it were; or if they did, it was only a fleeting experience. So - I asked myself the reason for this. Perhaps I had not gone about it in the right way; perhaps it was not the right time? And while thinking about this problem, I have been led on to examine the problems of "theological initiation" - the initial grasp or insight in to the whole meaning of theology. (By way of a bibliography, I refer to Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology, and his previous book, Insight.)

Finally, my last point of reference - a very special reference point - will be the study of the manuals of christian initiation in the early Church, which are none other than the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. These are the main source of the reflections which follow.

This paper will be divided into 3 parts:

The first part will be a brief glance at the manuals of christian initiation - why there are four, and the different stages of initiation they represent. In other words, I am going to propose tentatively that the 4 Gospels are illustrations of the different stages of the one Christian initiation.

The second part : given that there are these manuals for the 4 different stages (of initiation), I will give an analysis of these 4 stages and endeavour to draw some conclusions.

Third part : granted these 4 stages or "moments" of initiation, we will raise the question as to what are the presuppositions and characteristics that specify the particular stage of theological initiation.

This is the outline that I wish to develop.

My starting point has been, so to speak, a "working hypothesis" that I discovered in the notes of a spiritual director, which said very simply:

*"Mark, gospel of the catechumen;
Matthew, gospel of the catechist;
Luke, gospel of the theologian;
John, gospel of the priest".*

Starting from this intuition, it has been necessary to develop it and to verify it in practice, especially when I have been giving the spiritual exercises based on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and I have noticed how what is original in each Gospel emerges.

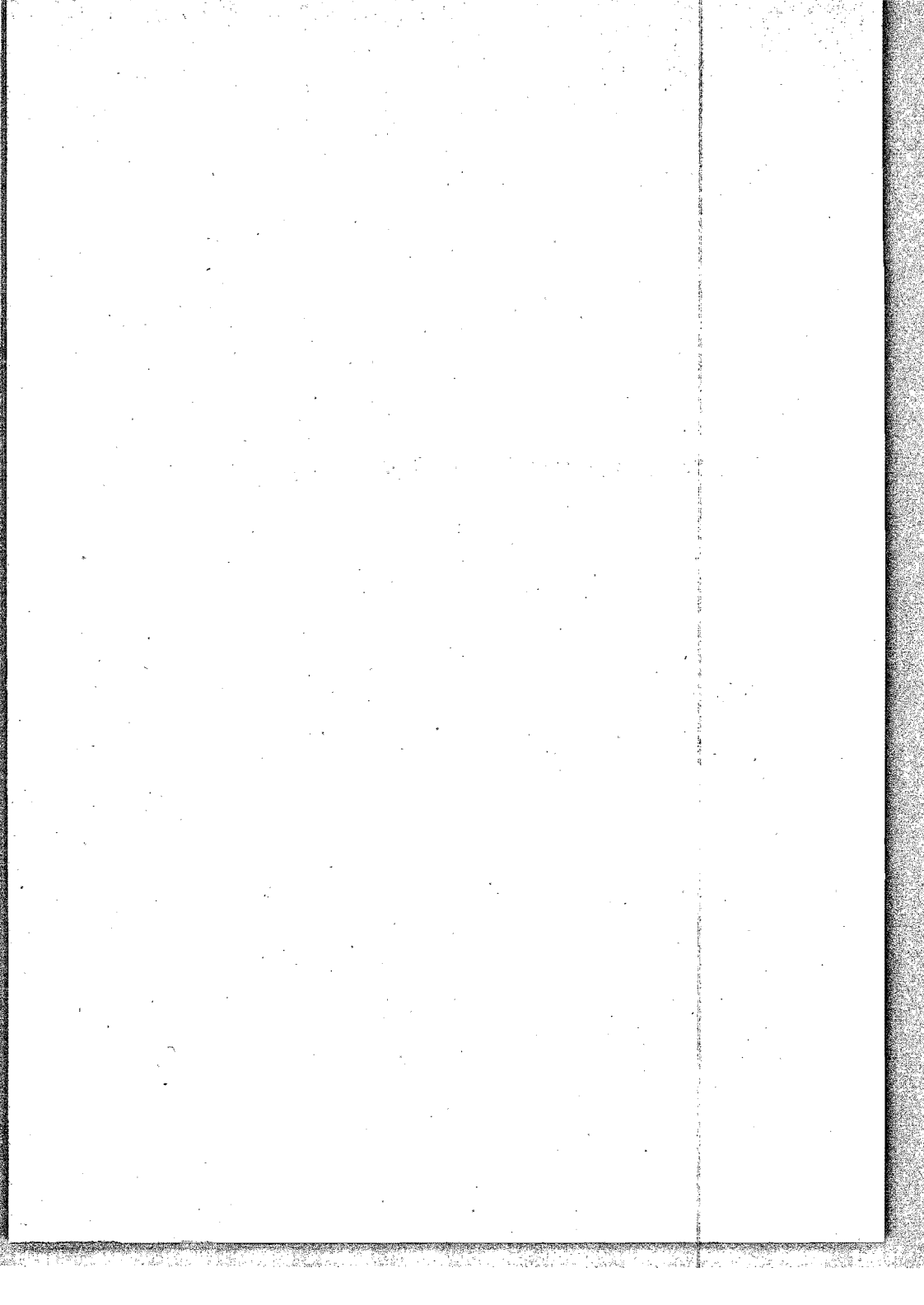
So I present here this "intuition", as I have followed it through, in the form of an hypothesis, and also in a partially symbolic form. By this latter phrase I mean that I do not pretend that all I read here and now in one of the gospels may be the sole end of this gospel; but rather in a particular Gospel some particular aspect (of Christian initiation) seems to be emphasized which allows us to make use of the following systematization.

Before we begin, it is worth noting - by way of confirmation, as it were - that the New Testament contains a

number of technical terms which refer to the different stages of Christian life: for example, the "catechumenoi", the "mathetai" (those who are learning, with a view to becoming disciples), the "photismenoi" (those who have received "enlightenment"), and finally the "teleioi" (the perfect ones, who have reached maturity).

* * *

I-FOUR MANUALS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION



1. Mark, the gospel of the catechumen

In describing Mark as "the gospel of the catechumen", I believe we can say that it contains elements which are essential for introducing a candidate, coming from a pagan milieu, into the catechumenate.

Mark teaches the candidate what is necessary to make the first step - the step of conversion. The candidate is led to the threshold of conversion by what maybe described as a "pre-baptismal catechesis".

By way of illustrating what I am saying, let me refer to Mark 4, 11, where we read:

"To you is given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but the others who are on the outside hear all things by means of parables".

Here we have the process that the gospel of Mark makes the catechumen go through. In fact he already knows something of the Church, something about this social group who

call themselves Christians; he has heard these people spoken of, but what he knows is only "in parables".

All this is somewhat enigmatic and intriguing : what should he do? Why are these people so enthusiastic? What sort of life do they live?

Now, the gospel of Mark aims at leading the catechumen "to the heart" of the Christian experience : *"To you is given the secret (or the mystery)"*. In other words, Mark's gospel leads the candidate through a process which begins with knowing something of Christianity - and the Christian life - "from the outside", which subsequently arouses his curiosity and provokes many questions and finally brings the candidate into direct contact with the mystery of Christ who calls him to conversion.

The candidate begins his journey, and so is born "the way of the catechumen". Now we who are in the Church sometimes encounter her as an enigma. We are more or less with in the Church but we live her life partly out of habit. "The way of the catechumen" consists, then, in passing from a knowledge dulled by habit which obscures the true meaning of something, to a direct encounter. As I see it, the way of the catechumen does not apply only to those who have not yet received the waters of baptism; it also applies to those who have not yet passed from "outside" to the "centre". We should not forget, besides, that in his gospel, Mark emphasizes the total abandonment that Christ experienced: *"My God, My God why have You abandonned me?"* That evokes, for all of us, the difficulties of our Christian life: not only the passing over, by way of the Cross, but also the fact that Christ who has healed so many sick people is always capable of healing us and helping us.

How do we bring about this passage, this passing over?

Through an encounter with the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ. As St. Paul has written, the pagan was very familiar with numerous gods and divinities; he lived in a world

where "religion" was something quite external to him, not touching the heart.

Now he is invited to pass from this world where the Church seems to be just one more religious sect among many others; he is invited to pass from all this to the God of Jesus Christ, the God who is absolutely unique.

An encounter with the God of Jesus Christ is an encounter with Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Hence the title of the gospel of Mark: *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God"*.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, is presented in two different ways in Mark; He is presented as the Master to be followed with enthusiasm, and then secondly as the Gospel to be welcomed.

The candidate for baptism must reach the stage of knowing, as a living experience, "Jesus is the Gospel".

Jesus in his way of living and dying shows us the true face of God.

And we should note here that the last part of Mark's gospel - the cry of the centurion - represents the cry of the catechumen on the threshold of baptism: *"Truly this was the Son of God"* (Mark 15,39).

And so Mark traces a journey which leads from a pagan God we may control, from a pagan God made in my own image and likeness, from an "idol", to a God we may not control, to a God who is completely "different". This is God who comes to us, who calls us, who attracts us to Himself and who helps us open ourselves, in His Son, to the authentic life of the Gospel.

Such, then, in very general terms, is the way Mark depicts the way of the catechumen. As we can see, it contains all that is essential for a very practical introduction into the stage preparatory for baptism.

It is not a "catechism" - a summary of things to be known and learnt; rather, it is a practical manual for some one in charge of a group of catechumens, to help him prepare them for baptism, by providing material to be proposed to them.

We might compare this gospel with the Exercises of St. Ignatius. The Exercises are not a book to be read; rather, they are a "manual" for helping the director and retreatant undergo a series of experiences which little by little open up the person to an encounter with God.

2. Matthew, the gospel of the catechist

We can describe Matthew's gospel in this way because, thanks to its clear and practical divisions, it contains material which is very helpful for a catechist who is initiating those who have been baptised into the life of the Church.

Matthew's gospel may also be aptly described as the "Gospel of the Church", for in introducing the baptised into the life of the Church, we find in it many things that Mark has passed over in silence. The baptised is initiated into the different stages of the mystery of the Kingdom which are expressed in the 5 great discourses of Matthew (in chapters 5, 10, 13, 18 and 24). It would take too long to examine the way in which Matthew gives his catechetical exposition, so I will limit myself to giving one or two passages which lend support to the view of Matthew's gospel as a catechism.

The first "reading key" is Matthew 28, 20: "*I am with*

you all days, even to the end of the world".

Starting from this point, we can re-read the whole gospel and explain to a person baptised just how Jesus is with us today. It is a way of approaching the text which enables us to see how this promise of Christ is fulfilled - actualised - in the life of the person baptised, and in the life of the Church.

Another "reading key", parallel to the one just quoted, is provided by a passage which is typical of Matthew - Ch.25,30-31-46; especially verses 35-36:

"I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me".

And the just reply:

"When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you to drink?"

The King answers:

"Whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me".

We should note carefully the pronouns - "When did we see you... You did it for me..."

Now, reading these texts as part of a catechetical instruction, what we see is an explanation being given to the baptised of how they can see the Lord in their brothers, in the midst of their life together in the Church.

To "apply" this discovery of the Lord in others, in

terms of living together in the Church, a person needs to be initiated into recognising the Lord in word and in sacrament, in one's brother, in the little ones, in the person one has to forgive.

Many passages of Matthew can be read in this light, as a practical initiation into the way of constantly recognising the presence of Christ in history, notably in the life of the Church.

In other words, Matthew presents us with a rather complex array; he gives us all the criteria, the conditions necessary for recognising the Lord in others. In this sense, he introduces us very concretely into the life of the Church.

3. Luke, gospel of the theologian

I will limit myself here to giving some basic reasons for the above statement.

Luke has dedicated both his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles to a certain Theophilus. Now, who is this man?

Whoever he may have been historically ("Theophilus", as the name indicates, means someone who loves God), it seems to me that Theophilus is the Christian who begins to realise the range and the extent of the Christian community, and the impact of the community on the world "outside" - a world that may be Jewish, Greek or Roman. These three worlds all appear in the Acts of the Apostles.

The Christian realises that his experience of the Church is not only the experience of a small group of people who understand one another and who recognise Christ; it is also the experience of being part of a Reality that makes an impact on the world around, which reacts sometimes

favourably, sometimes not. And so begin persecutions and accusations, the need to defend oneself and to explain one self (and we cannot explain ourselves to others unless we can first give an account to ourselves and recount our own history). Then, in particular, a very grave crisis strikes the new, little community, right at its Jewish roots: how is it to see itself in relation to Judaism, to the promises of God and in relation to the whole complexity of the world's history? And so there arises for the christian the following question: what is the relation between the experience of faith that I have in my own little community as I follow the moral and spiritual rules I find in the Gospel of Matthew, and the history of the world in which I live and in which I am immersed? And it is such a complex world - there is the history of the past, of pagan religions, of Judaism, of the promises of God; there is the history of the present, of the Greek world, of the Roman world; there are questions of philosophy, poetry; and there are so many problems and controversial issues to be solved.

This questioning leads to the deep and explicit realization that there is a History of Salvation and poses a problem which is specifically a theological one. The whole question was one of understanding the roots, in fact the very possibility of the new religion, and the contexts in which it finds itself.

But what is the relation between the History of Salvation and the history of the world? "*A theology*", Lonergan tells us, "*mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix*" (Method in Theology, p.21).

It seems to me that this is precisely the problem that led to the writing of Luke's gospel; it is a work quite distinct from the other gospels, for it has its own particular goal.

4. John, gospel of the priest

By "priest" here I do not mean, for the moment, an ordained priest; rather, I refer to a condition of seniority, of maturity; John is the gospel of the mature Christian, the enlightened christian, of the "perfect" christian ("te leios", as St. Paul says). Such a person is "perfect", not because he has no faults, but because he has reached the "end" ("telos"), the "goal" of every christian's journey. So it is a question of the christian who has attained a certain stature. All these images indicate that such a person has passed through the numerous experiences of christian initiation; this is a complex reality which embraces the "confession of faith", and knowledge of the precepts - that is to say, the person knows how to love, to pray and is familiar with the rites of worship. Not only has the mature christian passed through these experiences; he/she has brought them all together, and distilled them, like a fine liqueur. The christian maturity of which we speak sums up all that has gone before, bringing it to fruition, through the experience of faith.

The gospel of John is precisely the gospel which evokes and unifies all the previous experiences of the christian; it is the gospel of contemplation. It hardly contains precepts; it does not speak of rites; it does not cite very many confessions. His "confession" is - "*The Father gives us the Son*".

"Pistis" - the response of faith - is the counterpart to this. Whoever possesses this gift begins to love as Christ loved.

And so we see why John gives us only one precept: love. But this must be understood as a whole synthesis of life. The love of which John speaks is exactly the same as the love that is spoken of in the discourse on the Mountain, of Matthew, with its so many concrete examples. This is not an abstract principle from which we can draw all the practical conclusions. John's principle, "love", is a synthesis - a synthesis of life. Consequently, when he says:

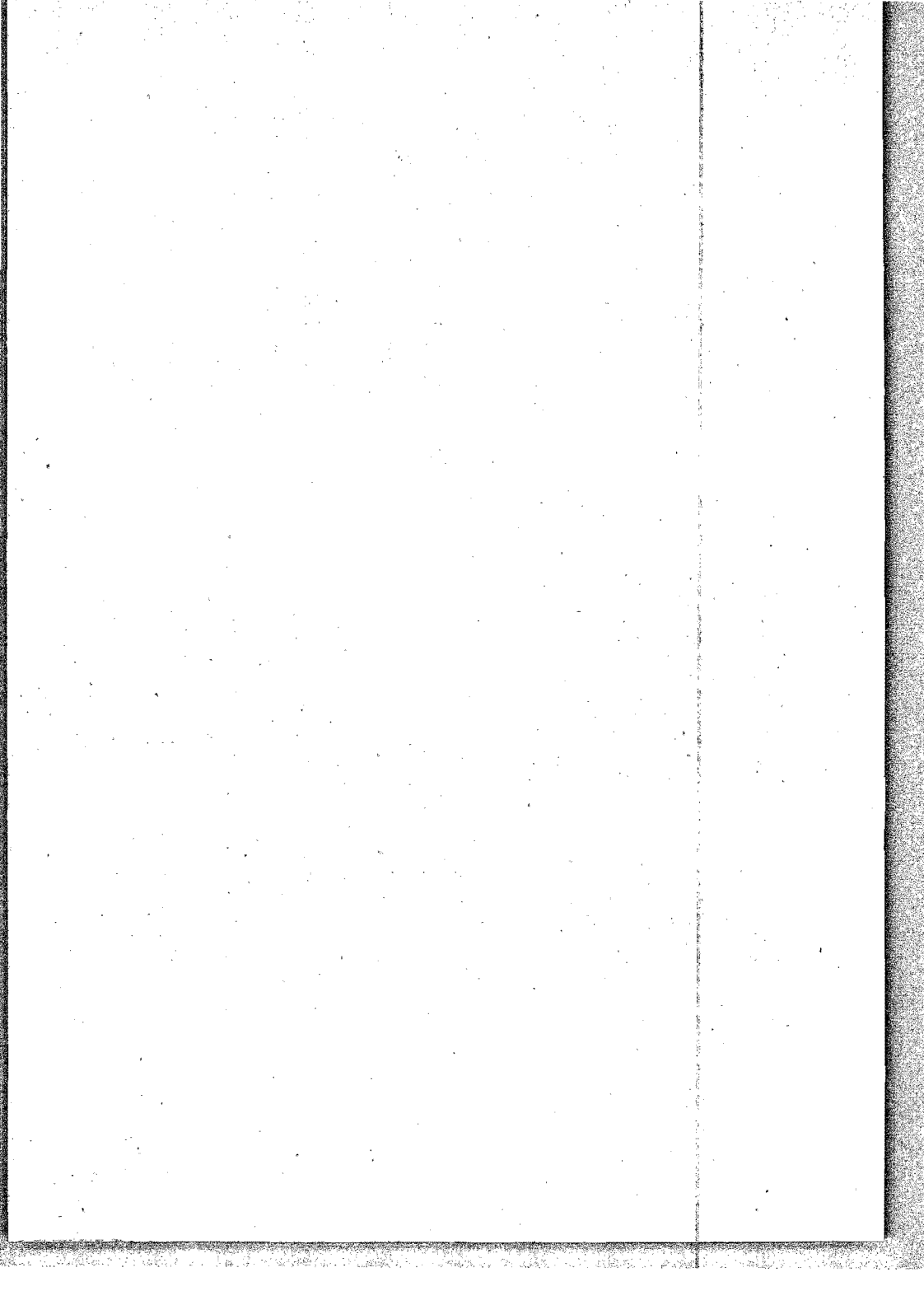
"The only thing we have to do, my children, is to love", he knows very well that the Church understands what he means, because she has had a long experience of it.

To take John's precept - synthesis - in the simplest possible terms is to bring together the existence of the christian and the history of the world, at their most basic level. The gospel of John is essentially contemplative - presupposing all the stages of initiation that have gone before, it invites the christian to go further on and reach the final point of "achievement" that is the heart of Christianity. At this final stage, love has become so profound, so full of meaning, that it can be proposed to the christian as the sole commandment.

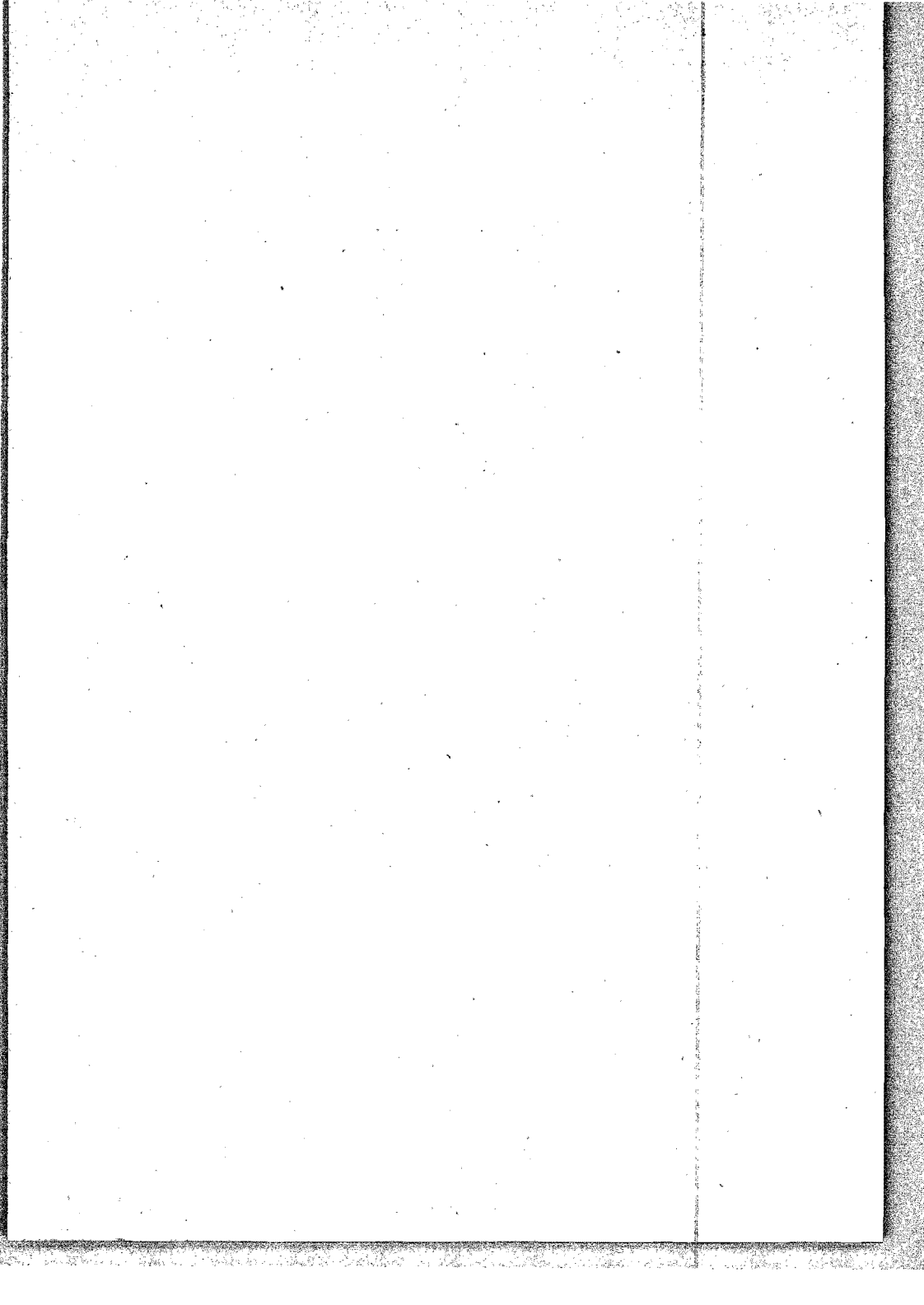
Summary

If we consider the gospels as manuals of christian initiation, we see that they represent successive stages to be gone through - stages that are indispensable for the christian experience. The last of these stages, which the gospel of John represents, must be preceded by the stages represented in Mark, Matthew and Luke; otherwise it will not be properly understood. In fact, there is a grave danger that it would degenerate into a vague sort of contemplation, quite enjoyable in its own way, but far removed from the concrete implications of John's gospel, such as service of the sick, care for one's brother and the poor.

Furthermore, no one can say, "The service of my brother is sufficient for me". No; I must understand why I serve my brother; my vision of the world and my act of charity must be brought together, integrated. Otherwise, such a service could never touch the heart of things; however heroic it might be, it could never be an act inspired by the love of the Father and the Son who have given so generously to me and to whom I respond with joy and simplicity.



**II-ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR STAGES
OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION**



So far we have given a panoramic vision of the 4 gospels as manuals of the christian experience. Is it possible to try to describe in greater detail, on the basis of what has been said, the different stages of christian initiation which correspond to these 4 manuals? It is difficult to give an answer to this because it involves the risk of becoming too "schematised", as it were, and of presenting christian living in a rather rigid perspective. We must always remember that God has the power to anticipate anything and everything, and that the Spirit works in full liberty; He can propose Johannine contemplation to a 6 yr. old child. Bearing in mind, then, the difficulties involved, let us try to bring together what we know, so as to be able to see, in a very broad way, how this journey to christian maturity can actually be experienced in subtly different ways, in diverse situations, while following its usual process. Let me propose 5 elements that may be found in each of the stages:

1. We can define the stage, by itself, in christian terms; we have already partially done that.
2. We can look for the "sacramental moment" that corresponds to each of the 4 stages. The question here is - in the experience of the Church, to what stage does a particular sacrament correspond?
3. We can see if there is - or if we can describe - a state of prayer that belongs more to a particular moment of christian initiation. (By a "state of prayer", I understand a situation where we feel that the Holy Spirit is inspiring the right sort of prayer for us, the sort of prayer that is adapted to the particular moment of our lives, according to

the words of St. Paul - *"For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express"* (Rom. 8, 26). And He comes to us in such a way that, at least indirectly, we understand that our stages of prayer can be real and appropriate, or alternatively, quite inauthentic.) So, a "state of prayer", then, is a way of praying that corresponds to the truth of a given situation in a person's life.

4. We can ask if there is a concern to reflect quite deliberately on events, from a "faith" point of view, in a way that is appropriate to a particular stage of christian initiation.

5. Finally there is a charism of service ("diakonia") which may be especially connected with a particular stage (of initiation), as it naturally flows from it.

Let us see if we can make more explicit these 5 aspects, these 5 elements, in all the 4 stages of christian initiation. What I am about to say is proposed on a tentative basis. I would be happy if these things strike a chord in others that would lead them to "correct" what I am proposing.

* * *

STAGE I

The aim of this stage is to plunge the catechumen into the mystery of Christ dead and risen, in such way that he/she may be led to the threshold of an experience of being "turned around", which we call conversion. We can ask - what is the "state of prayer", that is, what is the main concern that is expressed or cultivated in prayer during this stage? I would say it is what we find repeated several times in the Acts of the Apostles precisely at this moment

of the christian experience - "When the people heard this, they were deeply troubled and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What shall we do, brothers?'" (Acts 2,37). This is the stage to which the catechumen is led - "What must I do?" We find another example in the Acts, 16, 30, where, after his baptismal instruction, the prison guard of Philip exclaims - "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" There we see a type of prayer which corresponds to this stage; it is not only identified with the moment of baptism for it can equally be a stage of a new understanding of the christian mystery in the case of someone who previously had been living his Christianity in a superficial manner (from the "outside").

Connected with this type of prayer is another type which is called, most appropriately, "Baptismal prayer" - the prayer of Bartimaeus in Mark 10, 46-52. The blind man Bartimaeus is begging by the side of the road; he hears Jesus passing and begins to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, take pity on me!" (Mark 10,51).

We have here the typical series or succession of elements which prepare the way for Baptism. The catechumen is confronted with having to give up the world of idols; he is confronted with a lack of meaning in his life; he has an experience of salvation and cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, take pity on me". It seems to be one of those moments when time stands still; the crowd around him makes him cry out even more loudly. Christ asks, "What do you want?" - which indicates it is the person himself who must say what he wants. He wants the enlightenment that comes from baptism. We have here described the stages of baptismal prayer as they develop in a catechumen and in the new awakening of someone who is already a christian - the call for mercy interspersed with moments of simply waiting. It is the Church's concern that the catechumen should pass progressively through the stages of initiation, so that what he/she wants may become clearer, and so that the deep desires of the person's heart may truly emerge.

The type of ministry, or service in the Church, which is exercised at this stage is that of the person who pro-

claims the baptismal kerygma, and leads the candidate to baptism.

It is the "kerygmatic proclamation" of the Good News to those who are not yet baptised or to those who are still waiting to be enlightened on the meaning of their baptism.

There is no sacrament that corresponds to this stage, for it is a question of a person who is only on the way to baptism. But the Church does have rites and ceremonies for those who are not yet baptised, which express the actual stage of the "pilgrim's progress".

What sort of reflection, from a "faith" point of view, (that is, which sees things in the broad context of faith) characterises this stage? I would say it is a type of psychological and moral reflection on what might be called the "pagan duplicity of the human heart." This is expressed by Mark in Ch. 7, 21-22, where he brings a number of ideas together, and more fully in Romans, Chapters 1 and 2. It is a realisation of the malignity and non-sense of the world, and of the non-sense of living according to the world. It is an insight into the tragic inhumanity that an honest conscience - left to its own resources - can contend with only up to a certain point.

The pagan duplicity of the human heart is not something "outside" of us; it is deeply rooted in the heart. Far from being just a change in our behaviour, Christian morality involves a transformation and liberation of the human heart.

This psychological and moral reflection is adapted to this particular moment of christian initiation. The first pages of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, where he speaks of the general examen which is aimed at bringing to light our sins of thought, word and deed, corresponds somewhat to this theme. A person begins to see what exactly is his/her true situation before God, not only with regard to externals, but in his/her thoughts, heart and desires. The

implications of "conversion" are now understood.

* * *

STAGE II

This stage corresponds to the gospel of Matthew and presents two characteristic moments:

1. Conversion, properly so called, accompanied by baptism
2. Adhesion to the Church; a gradual entry into the body of the Church, involving a daily experience of it.

Conversion is to be understood not only as an act at a particular moment in time, but also as a process which continues. Conversion, preceded by the preparatory stage which Mark provides, is experienced as an "about-turn" movement which Lonergan (op.cit., p.150) calls, "the transformation of the subject and his world". This is a complex event: it entails that this "movement" is felt at the different levels of our experience, and a realisation of the implications of this "movement", which can be instantaneous. Now, this movement of conversion further means that various aspects and levels of the person's life begin to unfold and realise themselves within the context of the Church's life. Everything depends on this happening, and the second stage of initiation develops accordingly. What is characteristic of this stage - the stage of conversion - is that the person is invited to commit himself/herself to the name of Jesus and what this name represents.

In as much as this stage involves adhesion to the Church, the person is called to commit himself/herself to life in a community - a community which is concrete, historical and hierarchical. This community is the Church,

concretely existing here and now; it is this Church the catechumen enters. She is not the ideal Church of his dreams. It is a Church made up of definite individuals, each one with his own faults and his attitudes to life; for initiation take place in relation to concrete reality. The person is invited to accept this community as the presence of the Lord: *"I am with you always, even to the end of the world"*. From now on, his/her life must be marked by a certain capacity for dialogue and pardon.

There are two aspects of the particular type of prayer which corresponds to this stage.

1. The first aspect involves a confession of faith; this is indicated by a variant reading of Acts 8,37, which is retained in a large number of manuscripts. Philip explains the Scriptures to the eunuch from Ethiopia, starting from the book of Isaiah which he was reading, and announces to him the good news of Jesus. (This is the first stage - the announcing of the kerygma, the good news.) They come to some water and the eunuch says to Philip: *"Here is some water. What is to stop me from being baptized?"* This is the threshold of the second stage. Many manuscripts add the following verse, which is very important, as it is inspired by the liturgy of baptism: (cf. note in Jerusalem Bible) *"Philip said to him - 'You may be baptized if you believe with all your heart'. - 'I do', he answered; 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'"*. This expression is the prayer appropriate to this moment - a confession of faith.

2. The second aspect of the prayer of this time (which is an expression of the reality of baptism) is - initiation into the life of the Church, but an initiation which now goes more slowly and more deeply into things. The fact of the matter is that it is not easy to live in community (especially in an enlarged community, like the Church). We discover our faults and our own limitations, and selfishness appears; when all this happens, we must always be ready to pardon and seek to rediscover the initial enthusiasm and "freshness" that accompanies baptism. It is really necessary to be able to take the following step: *"I believe in Jesus Christ Son of God and I believe that He is present*

in this Church whose very reality is to live in a state of continual reconciliation, this Church which is constantly experiencing the pain and misery of her own limitations and the need for forgiveness". Here we are in the penitential stage which follows after baptism, throughout the whole life of the Church.

There is another prayer typical of this time which we find in Luke 18, 13. In this text, two prayers, within the context of the Church, are presented to us. The publican, like the pharisee, is already part of the people of God, and it is from their situation within the Church that they make their prayer. The pharisee prays - "*I thank you, Lord, that I am not like the rest of men*", which unfortunately immediately opens up a division between a person who makes this sort of prayer and other "companions" who have a lesser understanding of the Church that the Lord has given us. On the contrary, the publican, standing afar off, strikes his breast and says, "*O Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner*". This is the penitential prayer of the Church where we never cease to recognise ourselves as sinners and far removed from the ideal of the gospel. The sacrament which corresponds to this attitude is Penance, which restores our baptismal integrity.

Finally, there are 2 groups of ministries which correspond to this stage: the ministries of formation and the ministries of charity.

The ministries of formation are "passive", ministries in the sense that they are something we receive. The former catechumen becomes the focus for the ministry of teaching ("didascalia") which the Epistles of the Apostles often speak about. So we read in Romans 12, 7 : "*(So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us)... if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach*". It would seem, then, that teaching is the ministry which corresponds to the stage of catechesis. Throughout the New Testament, this ministry is spoken of (cf. Titus 1/1-2 and 2/1; 1 Tim. passim, and 2 Tim. 3/17). Really, the Scriptures are the basic instrument for catechesis as they are essential for teaching, engendering conviction and forming an attitude of justice.

Besides these ministries of "formation" - "passive" ministries, in the sense explained above - there are the active ministries of charity, which are cited in Matthew 25, 35-36. The person baptised exercises these ministries since his/her catechetical formation involves a formation in the service of charity. It is not a question of a purely humanitarian service, but of a service inspired by faith - a service that arises precisely out of a commitment in faith. Other important texts for the ministry of "diakonia" - service - are found in Romans 12,13-16: *"Share your belongings with your needy fellow-Christians, and open your homes to strangers" (v.13)*. Here we find an attitude of humble sharing whose general spirit is expressed in Romans 12,8: *"...whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully."*

* * *

STAGE III

The goal of this stage is an understanding of the mystery of the Kingdom, in the history of the world. In other words, it is a question of integrating one's conversion with a vision of the world that is as wide as possible - environment, philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology; in short, the whole reality of life. The question can be expressed in these terms: in the history of the world, what does it mean to be a community and how is it constituted?

The prayer which corresponds to this stage is, for example, Ephesians 1 and 2 - to realise the design of God and to sum up all things in Christ. It is a prayer of universal dimensions - a prayer that is the fruit of deep theological reflection. And it confronts the dramatic divisions which made the world intolerable then, as is the case now: the wall of separation between races and religions - the wall that Christ has come to break down through His own blood. This prayer contemplates the work of bringing this project to birth, even though the project is challenged by sectional interests who are only interested in their own

welfare. This is one of the contemplative forms of prayer that is associated with this state of someone who has reached the stage of a universal awareness and sees himself/herself as a citizen of the world and caught up in the destiny of all others. But we cannot contrive this stage artificially through our own efforts.

The sacrament appropriate to this time is Confirmation. In general, service ("diakonia") and its proper ministries are all ministries of witness, established by the Lord. The ones most appropriate to this stage are those of "evangeliser" and "didaskalos" - doctor or master that Ephesians 4, 11 speaks of. It is only here that the theologian appears. It is he who exercises a systematic reflection on the christian phenomenon as it is lived - on its sources, its internal coherence, its continuity with tradition and its meaning for the present.

The New Testament furnishes two examples of this activity. We can say that Luke acts as a theologian in relation to Theophilus - for him, he endeavours to make a systematic reflection on the christian phenomenon and its sources (Lk. 1, 1-4). We find another example in many of the writings of Paul: Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians ...; here Paul is providing a "theological service" for the benefit of all his communities. In Romans, he tries to show how the Jews and pagans are situated in relation to the one salvific plan of God, with regard to the promises of the past, their apparent check (or failure), and with regard to the religious and moral depravity of the pagan religions. In Romans, the framework which brings all these things together had already been prepared in Galatians. The first letter to the Corinthians contains some pages dealing with problems in the life of the Church. If we return to Luke, we uncover the questions taken up by the theologian: confronted by so many different visions of the world, each of which claims to be the right one, where do we find (how can we establish) the strength and the validity of the christian phenomenon? and what is the relation both of continuity and rupture between christianity and judaism?

This problem had already appeared in Matthew, but it

is in Luke that it becomes quite explicit and the main response emerges. Matthew takes up this question from within the community. By contrast, Luke views the question from the standpoint of anyone and everyone in the world. No doubt the reason for this contrast is that Matthew had only had experience of the judaio-christian community while Luke had known at close range the christian community which had sprung from paganism. He had actually lived the rupture with Judaism that Paul proclaims and so he had a wider range of experiences to draw on for his synthesis. Certainly, Matthew is a great theologian, but Luke is just one step ahead, from the point of view of the relation between the origins of christianity and systematic and technical theology - as it appeared in the 12th century, for example. Obviously, we are only at the beginnings of theological reflection. In effect theology only developed little by little in the Church. That is why reflection - in a technical way - with a technical vocabulary and a refined systematic method only began towards 1100 with Abelard. The Fathers made a great deal of theology, but that was tied to preaching - it was not a pursuit in its own right. But at the beginning of the 12th century, different theological "tracts" begin to be distinguished, and at the start of the 13th century, especially with a growing sense of the "technical", there begins a rigorous systematisation. Theology cannot do without this systematisation for it is a science which proceeds with the discovery by man of his own possibilities. In the New Testament, we are only at the beginning of a reflection that is properly theological; "formal theology", in the technical and modern sense does not yet exist. Nevertheless, we do find at least a deliberate attempt to "theologise" in the sense of seeking to reflect rationally on the relation of christians to other groups and to other movements in history. And this is done under the form of a dialogue and dialectic; dialogue in the sense that there is listening and responding, and a dialectic in the sense that there is a concern to discover not only points of agreement but also areas of opposition, with a view to making the necessary distinctions and then taking up the points of possible agreement.

It is here that I would introduce the definition of theology that Lonergan gives on p.154 of his book; in the situation we are speaking of, theology is the knowledge of

God and of the whole of reality in as much as it has been ordered by God according to the way He has made Himself known through the "complete" Christ, that is, Head and members.

* * *

STAGE IV

This corresponds to the gospel of John which is an experience of simplicity that is the fruit of contemplation; here we find underlined the fundamental values of "pistis" (faith) and "agape" (love). Everything is reduced to these two realities. In John we do not speak of prudence, justice, strength, temperance, chastity, for example; it is only a question of faith and love.

By way of illustrating this experience on the level of prayer, we can refer to John 17, the priestly prayer of Jesus. The Father glorifies the Son and in this glorification the Apostles are called to be united with Jesus; there is one vision which brings everything together.

On the sacramental level, the Eucharist corresponds to this stage. This is the sacrament of unity which gathers together all that has been scattered; where everything is summed up and expressed in the extreme simplicity of this gift of the Lord who makes us one - much more than we could ever imagine. Nothing is more simple than the Eucharist in its sign, and everything is said to us in these few words and symbols.

On the level of service ("diakonia"), we have the priestly charism. Not in the sense that this stage of christian life belongs only to priests, since all christians are called to the contemplative state; rather, in the sense that the priestly charism is the service appropriate to this

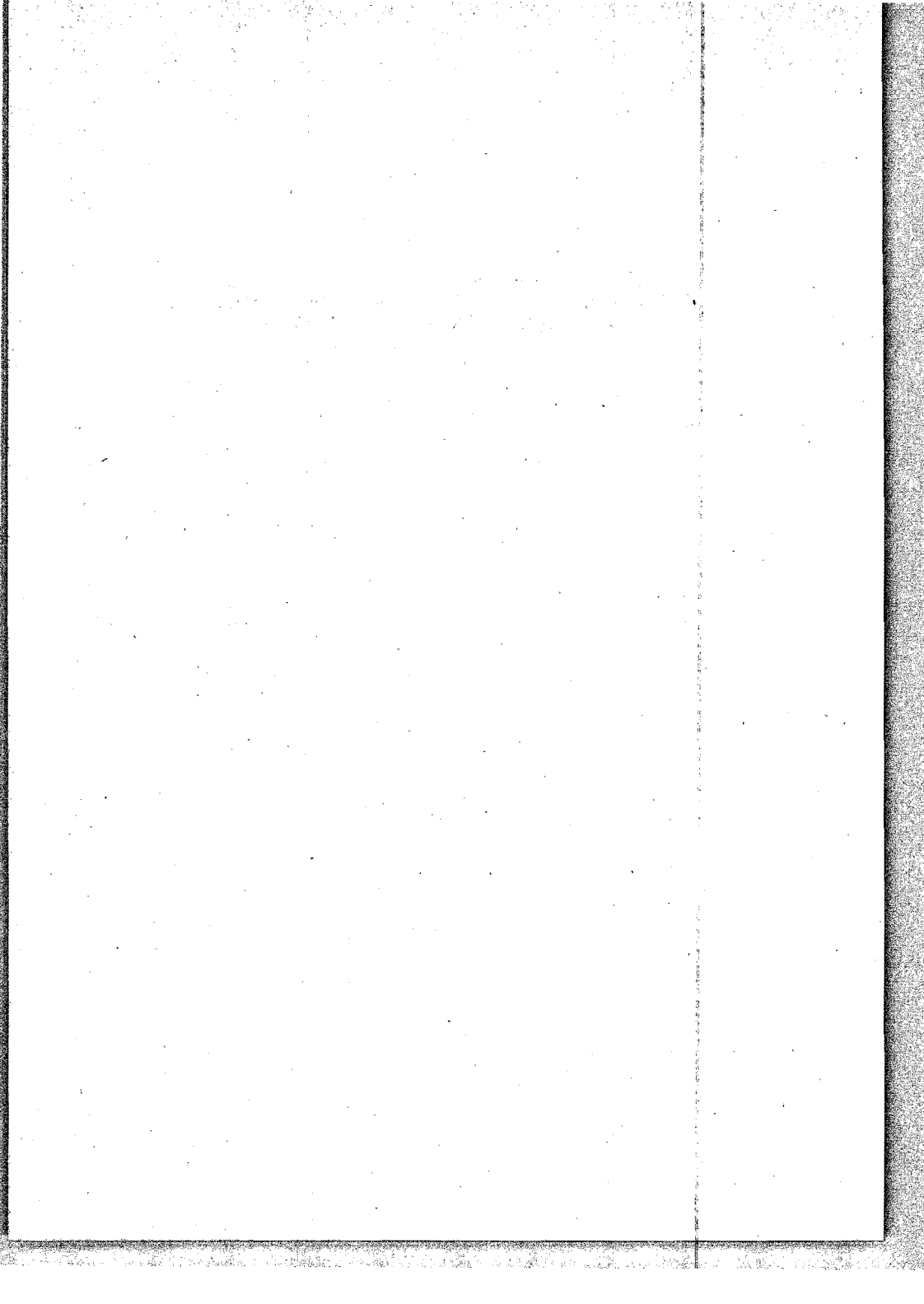
stage in as much as it is a service of unity.

Of course, the priest himself should already be a contemplative, if he wishes to express this charism.

On the level of knowledge, speculation gives way to contemplation. We could easily find a place here for doctrine which is based on mystical experiences - the reflections which only the mystics are in a position to make on the complexity and richness of their experience.

* * *

**III- CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STAGE
OF THEOLOGICAL INITIATION**



It now remains for us to draw some very simple conclusions:

1. Theological discourse implies the following experiences:
 - a) An initiation, on the catechumen level, which has proposed very clearly the centre of the christian experience. If a person has not yet succeeded in making his/her own this experience, he/she has not passed beyond the stage of initiation proper to catechumens.
 - b) A conversion which is real and effective, animating a person's whole mentality and his/her attitudes and perspectives. If this is lacking, there is a risk of basing one's theology on the experiences of others, which can easily be misunderstood when there is not the backing of personal experience.
 - c) A real experience, finally, of the Church. It is not sufficient to be a "good" person, interested only in one's own welfare; we must also be personally engaged, which implies at least the exercise of some of the ministries of charity.

But the question arises here - why does theology

presuppose these experiences? It presupposes these experiences not by way of a logical necessity, but because a person who moves into theology is engaged with matters at a level of reality which enables him/her to nourish his/her own reflection. Of course, theology is based on the Word of God but " ... *the man who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them... is like a man who was foolish enough to build his house on sand*" says Jesus (Matthew 7, 26). Without the christian experience, it is impossible to go to the heart of any theological insight - there is no theological "penetration". Without this experience, one really remains at the preliminary stage of theology; a person may philosophise, be engaged in historical research, but not in authentic theology.

2. Characteristics of the stage of theological initiation

- a) A necessary requirement is a time for speculation - that is, study and prolonged reflection. Theology demands a great deal of time, which is why the Church missions people full time for this reflection.
- b) But on the other hand, it is not a question of abstract reflection; reflection must be sustained by an experience and constantly referred to experience.

An intense experience of the Church, together with a rigorous seriousness in clarifying the various realities involved in such an experience - through methods properly theological (and not only pastoral or pedagogical) - should be able to coexist in sacred theology. But to achieve this equilibrium is precisely what is most difficult!

To conclude, let me add that christian formation must take its time, if it wants to be serious.

There is a temptation to go quickly and to jump over stages. But the Christ of the Gospel did not do that; He

was patient with the Apostles in the education He gave them.

Certainly God can by-pass any stages; in an instant He can bring about the transformation of a person from the stage of baptismal initiation to the stage of the mystical life of a contemplative. But, as a general rule, spiritual progress takes time.

In practice, then, we should ask ourselves where we are and try to discern the speciality of our own charism and of our own particular vocation. The essential thing for us is to exercise this gift, while waiting in confidence for the Lord to lead us towards the full realisation of ourselves - towards the perfection of the christian life.

* * *

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