

Jesus Christ, the One Savior of the World, Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Marc Ouellet

Christian faith is a divine virtue, come down from heaven in Jesus Christ, inculturated by the Spirit in Mary and the Church, and made fruitful for God's ongoing birth into the world.

Twenty-five years ago, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, a group of theologians decided to launch a new Catholic theological review in order to bring about and to sustain theologically the Church renewal proposed by the Council under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Hans Urs von Balthasar, encouraged in part by Adrienne von Speyr, took the initiative and set the tone with the first editorial, "Communio – a Programme." In this manifesto he delineated the principles, the task, and the requirements of a community of theologians committed to serving God in the spirit of *Communio*. David Schindler recaptured very well the original spirit of *Communio* with the title of his recent magnificent book *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*.¹ The spirit of *Communio* is to share the gift of Jesus Christ, the "heart of the world" from a clear stance at the center of the Church. Balthasar

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¹David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

wrote: "From a Christian point of view community can only be striven for because it has already been bestowed by God in Christ and in the infusion of the Holy Spirit."² The gift is given. The gift is at work. But to what extent are we aware of being preceded, commissioned, and empowered by the gift of the Son and the **Spirit for the mission of** *Communio*?

As a way of celebrating the gift of Jesus Christ, the one Savior of the world, yesterday, today and forever, I have chosen to meditate on Jesus Christ, mediator of the New Covenant, in the spirit of the Letter to the Hebrews, from which the theme of *Tertio millennio adventiente* is taken (Heb 13:8). We will deal with Jesus' priestly identity which is linked with his role as the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, the one "who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection" (Heb 12:12, Jerusalem Bible). Saint Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy in similar terms: "In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach..." (1 Tim 6:13-14). The question I would like to focus on is how this God-man Jesus Christ is the mediator of trinitarian life and the proper response for us to God's Covenant. How is he the one Savior of the world by being the unique mediator of the faith without which there is no salvation? Thomas Aquinas defined Christian faith as "*inchoatio vitae aeternae*," the beginning of eternal life. How is this faith shaped by Jesus Christ and the Spirit in order to be shared by us in the communion of the Church? My reflection will proceed in three steps: 1) A brief look on the situation of the faith in Jesus Christ on the eve of the third millennium; 2) Jesus Christ the one mediator of the New Covenant; 3) The meaning of a trinitarian christology for the New Evangelization.

1. Faith in Jesus Christ on the Eve of the Third Millennium

We can describe the situation of the faith at this time of the Church by taking some comments from Joseph Ratzinger's last interview with Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth*, which bears as subtitle: *New Report on the Faith*. Answering the questions of this agnostic journalist, Ratzinger stated: "In our time we have gained a lot in knowledge and experience, and thus we find the

²Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Communio – a Programme," *Communio* (1972): 6. (This article was published in English translation in Germany before the founding of the English language edition of *Communio* in 1974.)

faith so transformed and overly systematized that we no longer access it easily. I really think that we need a sort of revolution of the faith in many ways."³

He goes on to say that today we must find the courage to be counter-cultural. The context in which we live is marked by a prevailing ideology aimed at providing a certain state of well-being and satisfaction of human needs, but where God does not matter at all. Moreover, this ideology is strongly supported by the mass media and together they pressure the mind and reduce man's capacity to reach out to what is essential. Hence there is a sense of void and frustration in human experience which is a source of serious collective evils. Increasing violence is becoming the trademark of our civilization, depicted by John Paul II as a "culture of death" directly opposed to the Gospel of Life. "Therefore we ought to find the courage to set out on the way to confront the so-called human normalcy at the end of the twentieth century, and rediscover the faith in its simplicity."⁴

This rediscovery means first of all, according to Ratzinger, an "encounter with Christ," not as a hero of history but as "God made man." Only contact with genuine faith in Jesus Christ can foster a new orientation for human life, a deep personal commitment which would be able to create a "culture of faith." Such commitment entails a decision that ought to be not merely individual but communal, a decision that communicates itself and "creates communion" in the midst of an oppressive culture which ends up isolating people in deep solitude or in sectarianism.

Later on in the book, in dealing with the causes of the decline of faith in the Western world, Ratzinger points out the fact that the crisis of the Church today may not be the most serious since the beginning of Christianity, but it goes to the roots. Among the causes, there is the movement born of the Enlightenment which considers the Church an outdated institution. This movement allows humankind to develop religiosity, but in private, in the sphere of subjectivity; a binding objective content of the faith pertains to a former mythological stage of human consciousness. In the eyes of this movement, dogma and reason are contradictory. Despite the fact that the uncritical prestige of natural sciences has also declined, there remains a scientific model of rationality which considers the faith as more or less irrational and therefore irrelevant for public debate and even dangerous

³J. Ratzinger, *Il sale della terra: un nuovo rapporto sulla fede* (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 1997), 40.

⁴Ibid., 41.

for social policies. A by-product of this trend within the realm of Christian scientific exegesis ended up dividing a “Jesus of history” from the “Christ of the faith” (Bultmann). The former remains somehow open to the control of human sciences, the latter is left to the uncontrollable fluctuations of the Church’s decisions. The aftermath of this liberal exegesis appears in the confusion surrounding the interpretation of Scripture in the Church. A typical expression of this confusion is the publicity around the North American Jesus Seminar.

Another feature of the situation of the faith deals with the rejection of authority and tradition. The modern cult of individual autonomy entails a mentality of rejection of regulations, especially when these seem to be imposed by an institution like the Church. Ratzinger recognizes the difficult challenge involved in overcoming this mentality. Therefore he sees the future of the Church not so much in terms of a strong and large social movement, but rather in the qualitative development of small communities bearing witness to the liberating power of the faith. Actually, in his opinion, modern individualism coupled with the claim to be self-regulating means that the “rejection of suffering and creatureliness, the rejection of a rule for one’s own existence, in the end means the rejection of love itself, and this leads humankind to destruction.”⁵ In this context the Church remains a very important witness to human freedom and human liberation. Her role before oppressive totalitarian power has produced historical effects in our time. But the fall of Communism with its potential for religious development does not mean automatically a choice for Christian faith. The world has become a free market of religions where a wide spectrum of religious products is offered and promoted with all the ambiguities of human communication. The Church may easily appear less attractive and fulfilling, for she presents herself with a heavy dogmatic apparatus on the one hand, and with loaded ethical demands on the other hand. Islam, Buddhism, and New Age offer less content and control to a humanity reluctant to submit to exterior regulations.

To sum up: faith in Christ on the eve of the third millennium is characterized by a growing distance between the Church and the world despite the event of Vatican II. “Jesus Christ Yes, the Church No” is a slogan that describes fairly well the situation of indifference, dissent and silent apostasy of the masses. Moreover, an increasing polarization within the Church reveals

⁵Ibid., 193.

factions struggling for liberation, orthodoxy, power and more participation at all levels. All in all, the impression is that modern anthropocentric culture has penetrated deeply into the Church and has undermined the faith by shifting the focus away from the real target. This is another message from Ratzinger's report on the faith. Where we as Church should deal with the real thing, which means dealing with Jesus Christ proclaimed to the world, we find ourselves dealing with secondary issues like Church politics, ordination of women, celibacy, sexual ethics, etc. The focus on these important but secondary issues, particularly in ecclesial circles of Western societies, reveals a self-absorption of the Church that is a mark of our time and culture.

Therefore we must not miss the *kairos* of the coming jubilee which should help us to refocus the attention on Jesus Christ, the one Savior of the world. The time has come for applying the pedagogy of evangelization proposed by Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Love Alone*:

Where "the discernment of Christianity" is concerned, it is probably best to start out from the assumption that we are (already) living in an atheistic, anthropocentric period and—as far as the Cosmos is concerned—in an evolutionary *milieu*. This world will not expect psychological or sociological, or biological contributions from us Christians; it produces enough of its own. What, then, is the specifically Christian task? Not, surely, to busy oneself with peripheral questions, but with truths derived from the centre. And we cannot prepare ourselves too well, or fit ourselves too soon, to express these truths with the greatest degree of clarity at a level that is convincing.⁶

2. *Jesus Christ, the One Mediator of the New Covenant*

Among the central truths sought for today in the context of interreligious dialogue, we find the question of Jesus Christ as universal mediator: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tm 2:5). Once possessed as a common ground for all Christian believers regardless of denominations, this central truth is now questioned and reinterpreted in a way that concerns the core of the faith and the ultimate meaning of Christianity. For example, an increasing number of theologians

⁶H.U. von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 124-25. It is worth mentioning here that the journalist who interviewed Ratzinger was so impressed by the quality of the Cardinal's testimony that he decided to return to the practice of Catholic faith.

address the question of Christ's universal mediation in light of the rediscovery of the Spirit. A Spirit-centered theology inspired by modern thought (Hegel) would then allow us to understand a plurality of symbolic (categorical) mediations of grace against the backdrop of God's transcendental self-communication to all human beings. The danger of this perspective is that Jesus Christ is reduced to a higher case of God's universal self-communication in the Spirit. In this regard some disciples of Karl Rahner have distanced themselves from their master in relativizing and reinterpreting substantially the way the Church has always understood the unique mediation of Jesus Christ. At the 1996 convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, for instance, John R. Sachs provided an example of the way a Rahnerian pneumatology "from below" may confuse trends of the culture with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He outlined a pneumatology very open to the world but rather disconnected from christology. Hence the need for a deeper integration of christology and pneumatology. In other words, Catholic theology is challenged today to articulate God's communication to the world in a way that integrates more deeply our understanding of Christ and the Trinity. Otherwise we risk losing our identity and therefore our relevance, precisely in the task of interreligious dialogue. For the sake of this deeper integration, I would like to indicate at least in outline how Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the one and unique mediator of the New Covenant.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). The virginal conception of Jesus is achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit. Saint Augustine stated clearly that it is a conception out of grace and faith and not an event of nature elevated afterwards to a higher level of meaning. This means that from the scene of the Annunciation onwards, the Covenant between God and humanity has reached a decisive phase of realization. After a long time of preparation marked by God's election of Israel and a dramatic struggle of faith and resistance to God's Word, the history of salvation has reached the fullness of time, the time of fulfillment of the promise through the Incarnation. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4:4). *Tertio millennio adveniente* begins with this solemn statement from Saint Paul which proclaims from the outset God's initiative and human cooperation to his plan. The Holy Father refers to Saint Bernard and stresses the central role of Mary in bringing to the world

the gift of the incarnate Word: "Never in human history did so much depend, as it did then, upon the consent of one human creature."⁷ Among the cloud of witnesses chosen by God, Mary appears like the dawn announcing the sunrise; the scene of the Annunciation signals the climax of a crescendo of revelation and faith that continues, with ups and downs, from Abraham, Moses, and the Prophets until the miracle of her immaculate *fiat*. The simplicity and majesty of this faith deserves a deeper reflection on the mystery of the Person of Christ, through whom "eternity entered into time" (TMA, 9).

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. The divine person of Jesus Christ was confessed by the Church from the very beginning: "No one can confess Jesus is Lord without the Holy Spirit." "Jesus is Lord" is one of the first confessions of the divinity of Christ. When confronted with Greek culture, a new affirmation became necessary in dialogue with the cultural categories of the time. Hence the conciliar definition of the divine nature of Christ against Arianism and the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) attributed to Mary as the mother of the divine Son in his human form. The confession of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 summed up and closed a large debate, both existential and theological, which lasted for over two centuries: Jesus Christ is

perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man..., consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to humanity.... He was begotten from before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosopon*) and one hypostasis. (CCC, 467)

What we call the hypostatic union is not an abstract concept built by theologians in search of high speculations. The hypostatic union is the concrete event of the Son of the Most High assuming human flesh in such a way that, in him, the relationship between God and humanity becomes not only a personal one but becomes the "covenant in Person" (Balthasar). Jesus

⁷John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 2. The pope refers to Saint Bernard, "In Laudibus Virginis Matris," *Homilia IV, 8, Opera Omnia*, Edit. Cisterc. (1966), 53.

Christ is the perfect Yes of God to humanity and the perfect Yes of humanity to God. Jesus Christ is not only the mediator of a New Covenant; He *is* the New Covenant. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the full and concrete reality of a human existence is taken in and assumed within the relationship of the Son to the Father in the Trinity. His act of created dependency (receptivity) from God as a man is thus assumed within his act of filial dependency (receptivity) from the Father as God, and becomes a function of the latter. Hence, all the human events of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection are the revelation and mediation of his trinitarian life.

All the human events of his life are an alphabet for spelling out the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. When Jesus was born from the Virgin, his eternal birth from the Father's love was expressed. When he prayed and worshipped with his intimate "Abba," people were utterly impressed and even scandalized by his daring familiarity with God. When he worked as a humble carpenter and later on as a preacher, he revealed that trinitarian love is Word and deed. When he suffered, died on the Cross and was buried, he mediated in a very unique way the passionate and suffering love of the Father who gave up his only-begotten Son for us. When he was raised from the dead at the end of his journey of loving obedience to the Father, the Spirit of love began to proceed from the Father in his very flesh. It was the seal and the proof that the New Covenant was achieved and made fruitful for the salvation of all.

The hypostatic union is thus the event of the Word of love, espousing Jesus' life and death as the new and fruitful Covenant to humanity through the Spirit. Catholic theology needs to reflect more than ever on the mediation of the Spirit in the event of the hypostatic union. This mediation plays a key role in shaping christology and Christian faith. Let us try to give a general idea of this pneumatological christology. Jesus becomes personalized as a human being by the grace of the Holy Spirit who creates and mediates his radical belonging to the Word sent by the Father as the only-begotten Son. The uniqueness of this belonging shines forth precisely in the way the Holy Spirit creates it, mediates it and then proceeds from it. In fact, the mediation of the Holy Spirit in uniting Christ's two natures in his divine person is an ongoing event of Jesus' life. It concerns both his being and his consciousness. It embraces his becoming aware of the will of the Father day after day, his being enlightened by the Spirit at baptism, his being driven to the desert, inspired in prayer, empowered with God's dynamism for preaching and miracles, submit-

ted to the extreme obedience of the Passion at the end of his mission. All the way through, Jesus is being formed and confirmed as the high priest of the New Covenant, the one mediator entrusted with the responsibility of reconciling the world to God in the Spirit. To bring this about fully required that he learn obedience through suffering in order to become the high priest "worthy of faith and compassionate," capable of leading our faith to its perfection. Thus he offered himself to God, "through the eternal Spirit," once for all, in order to purify our conscience from dead actions so that we can worship the living God.

A biblical scholar sums up the message of Jesus' priestly identity in this way:

When the author of the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims, at the end of his splendid discourse: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8), he refers to the whole priestly christology which was developed masterfully in the former chapters. "Yesterday" means his paschal glorification; Jesus Christ is the one who, through a perfect filial docility to God and through a generous solidarity with us, has brought to perfection the double capacity of relation which he has possessed as the Son of God made man. He has become from then on, and forever, the high priest worthy of faith in his relation with God and full of mercy towards all his brothers (2:17). He has become capable of opening God's intimacy to man and he has put in motion an intense dynamic of communication and communion."⁸

Finally, I would like to unfold the trinitarian logic at work in this priestly christology. Jesus Christ was designated the high priest of the New Covenant through his being obedient unto death. He thus became mediator of the eternal Spirit in his flesh as he is mediator of the Spirit in the Trinity. The Resurrection was the turning point of his priestly identity. From then on he is fully mediator, from bottom to top and from top to bottom: his obedience has reached the point of expressing fully his trinitarian procession from the Father in the Spirit and his return to him through death. For the Resurrection means the confirmation of Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed, the Son of God, by the Spirit of holiness (Rom 1:4). Resurrection means the irruption of the Spirit in his flesh as a reward for his obedience, as an answer of the Father's love to the love of the incarnate Son. Hence, in Johannine theology, the gift of the Spirit flows from the pierced side and

⁸A. Vanhoye, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever": The Holy Year, a Celebration of the Mystery of Salvation," in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Paris 1996), 25.

the last breath of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is thus given in its personal character as being the communion between Father and Son, confirming God's name and God's revelation as love. He could not be given in this way before the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, for God's intimacy had first to be laid bare on the Cross for our sake in order to reveal his divine trinitarian identity and to provide us with the means to grasp it with the gift of the Spirit.

Therefore two conditions were necessary for the full constitution of Christian faith: 1) the shaping of Jesus' obedience through the Spirit as the perfect human answer to God's Covenant; 2) the outpouring of the Spirit into our hearts as the personal fruit of Christ's answer. In other words, the full communication of God's trinitarian love in human form was required for the faith to be shaped from within as the full correspondence of human faith to divine faith in Christ. Balthasar writes in a bold essay on the consciousness of Christ:

The *fides Christi* stands at the living crossroads of the Covenant between God and man. When God's Word become man, the *fides Dei* was incorporated into Christ and God's Covenant of fidelity became one with humanity. This man who is, as the expression of God's essence and deliberate love, his Son, is the incarnate "faithfulness of God" (*pistos ho Theos*) in whom "all the promises of God have found their Yes" (2 Cor 1:18, 20).⁹

For lack of a better word, Balthasar uses the term "faith" to describe Christ's human and divine attitude before God within the realm of the Covenant. According to him, the Old Testament attitude of faith (*'emet* – fidelity, *amen* – adhesion, *batach* – being situated in security, *chasah* – refuge, *chakah*, *yichel* – to wait and hope) is not canceled by the New Testament fulfillment. On the contrary, its elements are integrated into the New Testament faith, which underscores likewise its dimensions of faithfulness, patience, vigilance, and hope. As regards the specific content of New Testament faith in terms of knowledge of God, it is clear that there is a major difference from the Old Testament. The difference between promise and fulfillment of God's revelation in the Son does not allow one to ascribe faith to Jesus' experience without qualification. Being the only-begotten Son of the Father, Jesus does not believe in God as opposed to knowing who he is. He enjoys the "vision" of the Father in a way that excludes the obscurity we experience in faith. Saint Thomas Aquinas was ada-

⁹H.U. von Balthasar, "Fides Christi: An Essay on the Consciousness of Christ," in *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 78.

mant in excluding the faith dimension from Christ's beatific vision. Despite the fact that the New Testament concept of faith does not apply properly to Jesus, Balthasar concludes that the rich and complex Old Testament attitude called faith is achieved and perfected in Jesus.¹⁰ Therefore he is called the "pioneer" of our faith (Heb 12:2), the one who prefigured the perfect faith as an image and exemplar, and thus received from God at the Resurrection the redemptive power of imprinting and expressing in us the original image that he has lived.

As a matter of fact, it is only after the Resurrection that the faith of the Church is truly constituted as divine faith, christological faith. For example, Mary's faith has grown between the time of the Annunciation and the moment she takes her place at the foot of the Cross. She matured with the progressive unveiling of the Word. Before the Resurrection, the fullness of the Word and the possibility of its divine interpretation by the Spirit had not yet been articulated as a complete alphabet for the believers. It lacked the ultimate trinitarian configuration by the Holy Spirit who "brings the inner attitude of the triune God into us." For the faith of the Church is essentially a divine faith, a christological faith whose object and subject are ultimately God. By the power of his loving obedience in the Spirit, the Incarnate Son is able to infiltrate human faith with his Spirit and communicate his divine faith to the human heart. Aquinas defines faith as "*inchoatio vitae aeternae*," which means participation in the trinitarian life. Balthasar goes further by showing that the divine receptivity of the Son in heaven (born from God) weds human receptivity on earth (obedience) to the point of bearing together the fruit of the Covenant, the Holy Spirit. "Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! ... From his heart shall flow streams of living water" (Jn 7:38). For Christian faith is a divine virtue, come down from heaven in Jesus Christ, inculturated by the Spirit in Mary and the Church, and made fruitful for God's ongoing birth into the world.

3. Christological Faith and the New Evangelization

What is the relevance of these reflections for the New Evangelization? In the midst of this trinitarian christology, we may feel somehow far away from hot issues discussed in theological or pastoral meetings. Since we celebrate Jesus Christ the one Savior of the world, let us indicate some of the concrete ap-

¹⁰Ibid., 43-79.

plications we can draw from this truth.

The first thing I would suggest is that we use the jubilee to refocus the Church's attention on the core of the faith. "Love alone can be believed – indeed it can and must be believed only as love. To recognize this absolute and its priority over everything, this is the achievement and 'task' of Faith: To believe that there is love, absolute love, and that there is nothing beyond it."¹¹ There is nothing more urgent at all levels than to proclaim and confess from the heart the mystery of the Holy Trinity as absolute love laid bare in Jesus Christ. No real evangelization, no family renewal, no community life, no social influence of the Gospel, no serious interreligious dialogue is possible without retrieving this most basic truth of Christianity.

The second thing I would underline is the possibility of deepening who we are. One of the limits of Christian evangelization in times past was to moralize too much, to tell people what to do instead of revealing to them who they are for God. Who we are as image of God enhances infinitely our human dignity and makes us responsible for God's love for the world. Let us listen once more to Balthasar: The Holy Spirit "brings the inner attitude of the triune God into us and in this way qualifies us on two sides: to respond to God's call and gift in a manner worthy of God, and to impart the divine attitude into our relations with our fellows (cf. 1 Cor 13)."¹² "Christian, recognize your dignity!" is the first call of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as it introduces Christian morality (CCC, 1691). Christian, remember that God's grace precedes Christian ethics and justifies its demands. Since the Catechism has happily restored the order of precedence of grace over ethics, let us hope that we will learn to appreciate grace as the divine persons dwelling in us and liberating, from within, new energy and synergy for divine communication and communion among people.

Our human dignity rests on the ground of our being created in God's image with the capacity to relate to God and to our fellow human beings in faith, hope, and love, which means in a divine way. We ignore too often who we are and we forget to nurture our "theological virtues" with the Word of God and the living water flowing from the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To raise awareness in this regard is one of the main tasks of the new evan-

¹¹Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 83.

¹²M. Kehl and W. Löser, eds., *The von Balthasar Reader*, trans. R.J. Daily and F. Lawrence (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 322.

gelization. Pope John Paul II is adamant in proposing Christ to the Church and human rights to the world. He repeats as a refrain *Gaudium et spes*, 22: "Only in Jesus Christ man is revealed to himself." His deep concern and commitment for the defense of human life reveals a profound theological vision of human dignity grounded in Jesus Christ, the "*Redemptor hominis*." His pontificate has set the tone for a new springtime of christological faith in the Church. It is our responsibility to make it fruitful for the world.

Thirdly I would stress the need to reactivate the memory and the need to retrieve the sense of belonging to the broader community of believers that has traversed the centuries. Christian faith is not a punctual consensus, a kind of "common ground" worked out by ecclesial procedures. It is a living relationship from person to person as an ongoing memorial of Sacred Revelation and divine Tradition. *Deus tradidit semetipsum*. The Holy Eucharist is the most concrete setting wherein the *mysterium fidei* is actualized and handed on literally from person to person and generation to generation. There will be no mystical breakthrough in the Church's consciousness, no deep awareness of trinitarian love in the community without a liturgical refocusing on God as the one to be worshipped, the one to be adored and to be served. Cardinal Ratzinger does not hesitate in denouncing the way the liturgy of the Church has become in many circles a "fabric of specialists" instead of being cultivated as a sacred reality that precedes us, embraces us, and invites us to surrender ourselves to the mystery of God.

Finally, last but not least, Jesus Christ mediator of the New Covenant is the mediator of *Communio* as a family of spirits gathered in the Spirit of love and dedicated to witnessing "in truth and love," the edifying mission of the theologian in the Church. As the third millennium draws near, may the Spirit make our faith contagious and our minds holy in dealing with the discernment of theological matters. Twenty-five years ago Hans Urs von Balthasar concluded "*Communio—a Programme*" with a call to holiness, imploring the grace needed to expose ourselves for the truth with Christian love and courage. This call is more relevant than ever. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and leader of our faith, who made his beautiful confession of faith before Pontius Pilate, and let us run with him the race to eternal life in the midst of our daily combat for the radiance of the faith.* □

*This article is adapted from a conference given at the *Communio* retreat in Munsonville, New Hampshire, 27-29 June 1997.

