

(English translation)

19 October 1970

New Humanism

In today's consumer society the main thing we want to save is time.

If we read advertisements, or listen to the radio and T.V., we often hear the expressions: "instant, ready-made, immediate delivery."

Even sculptors and painters now work fast and take shortcuts, whereas in the past, the artist took his time.

The changes came fast in our own familiar cities. The field at the city limits has now been transformed into a suburb.

In just a few months time, streets that we walked along for years are turned into highways.

Everything is done quickly and efficiently, a lot is prefabricated.

This is even more true in the field of communication. It is now possible to reach people far away, saving a lot of travel time.

It is impossible not to be influenced by this new pace that humanity is caught up in, even for Christians who are careful and are attracted by the mysteries of the spirit, even for people open to the most sublime things, especially where greater progress has been reached.

To spend hours in solitary contemplation or in long meditation is no longer practiced.

We prefer to follow short but safe formulas in order to reach our goal, which in this case is nothing less than our union with God.

A sentence attributed to Saint Bonaventure seems to be very up to date: "A person progresses further along the way of God in forty days if he never stops, than in forty years even if he is cloistered and has all the tools to be perfect, if he stops every once in awhile along the valleys of imperfections and venial sin."

Such a statement should impress us and instil a certain charge of enthusiasm in each of us.

It should make us wonder how we can manage not to stop at imperfections and venial sins. The answer seems obvious, and that is to seek perfection constantly. But first we must know what perfection is. We know from Christ that perfection lies in loving, because the person who loves does not sin. It is the love of God, which is concretely expressed in the love for our neighbour. If we love our brothers and sisters now, we are constantly passing from death to life and this too is the guarantee of eternal life for us.

Today the whole world is marching toward a new humanism, (variously expressed in different ideologies) that fascinates crowds and individuals. This makes the Christian imperative of charity seem very modern. The Christian imperative leads to a humanism where one person regards another and where groups regard each other through the transfiguring lens of the person of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council itself became aware of the human being's new place in modern society. The Council reaffirms that the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore the law for the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. Those who believe in divine love are confirmed by Christ that the way of charity is open to all humankind and that all efforts to foster universal charity are not in vain.

Pope Paul commenting on this fact said, "The Church tends to give human beings their right value, to respect them, to give them the awareness of their own greatness. The Church does not humiliate people, but exalts them. The Church does not anesthetize people but wakes them up to a sense of their dignity. The Church never despises them, but appreciates them and loves them, goes towards them, embraces them, giving to them almost her own heart, like Jesus who washed the feet of the apostles, like the saints who were able to embrace the lepers and the sick ones. Charity finds itself in the role to which

the Church is called, to lead humankind to its full development...."

The saints always saw this whole reality very clearly; they reached the peaks of perfection because they loved their neighbour.

They wrote of Catherine of Siena, "...but Catherine thought that it was not enough to give what we are asked, it was not enough to listen to those who begged. She began to go and look for the underprivileged. When everybody was sleeping she went and left bread, wine, a little flour and a basket of eggs at their door, the same as St. Nicholas of Bari, and then she would run away so nobody would see her."

Saint Teresa of Avila, a contemplative in the highest sense of the word, used to say, "...the Lord needs action. For instance, he doesn't want you to worry about missing that particular devotion in order to console a sick person when you see that you can help him/her, making their suffering yours, fasting if necessary, to give them something to eat. This is what real union with the will of God is."

You would expect people who were very close to Christianity to have the same vision. What Ghandi said in *As Ancient As the Mountains* is very beautiful: "...if we love those who love us this is not non-violence. Non-violence is to love those who hate us. I know how difficult it is to follow this sublime law of love, but aren't all great and good things difficult? Love for our enemies is the most difficult of all. But with the grace of God even this most difficult task becomes easy if we want to do it..."

"...the golden rule is to be friends of the world and to consider humankind as one family. Those who make distinctions between the faithful of their own religion and those of another go against the members of their own faith and open the way to refusal and irreligion."

Atheistic ideas have some influence on young and often inexperienced people because they contain a certain love for humankind.

For them the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* is especially valuable. Yes, we have to reach a humanism but it must be "open toward the absolute." Otherwise, St. Paul admonishes, "It's worth nothing."

Paul VI said that the precept of Christian charity contains a potential that no philanthropy or sociology could ever reach. And examining our charity, he says that it is still enclosed within the limits set up by customs, interest and selfishness, which must be enlarged.

It becomes logical that it is urgent to transform all our relationships - those with our family, colleagues, acquaintances, people of the whole world - into Christian relationships. Urged and enlightened by love, we must start individual and social works, remembering that if we will be rewarded for a glass of water, a hospital, a school, an orphanage, an institute for the re-education of other people (if these are means to express our charity) will prepare us for a brilliant final exam of our life.

God will tell us,

"I was hungry in your husband, in your children, in the population of India, and as you saw me in them, you fed me.

"I was thirsty, I was naked in your little ones every morning, in your brothers and sisters in many nations, where living conditions are inhuman, and you, always seeing me in everyone, have clothed me with what you had.

"I was orphaned, hungry, sick in the children of your neighbourhood, as well as in the population of Pakistan overwhelmed by tragedy and menaced by cholera, and you did everything you could to help.

"You put up with your mother-in-law, with your nervous wife and menacing co-workers, or with your employer who is not too understanding, because you are convinced that perfect social justice can only be achieved if it is based on social charity. And you did all this because you have seen me in everyone.

"You visited your relative in prison, you prayed, and helped the best you could those who were oppressed and threatened in the depths of the spirit..."

Speechless, we will then have only one word, "Thank you, thank you God, for opening on earth the most direct way, the shortest for us, to reach our heavenly destination."