084 - The Encyclical Letters "Fidentem Piumque" and "Grata Recordatio"

Leo XIII
John XXIII

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The Encyclical Letters

"Fidentem Piumque"  "Grata Recordatio"
Pope Leo XIII  Pope John XXIII

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ABOUT THE DOCUMENTS

Due to circumstances beyond our control, we find it impossible to present Pius XI's *Lux Veritatis* as *Marian Library Studies* No. 84. Through the kindness of the editors of *The Pope Speaks* and the translator Rev. Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm., S.T.D., Assistant Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America and member of the International Pontifical Marian Academy, we are able to bring to our readers two pontifical documents, *Fidentem Piumque* of Leo XIII and the *Grata Recordatio* of Pope John XXIII. The commentary which follows (that of Father Carroll) will demonstrate both the interrelation of these two encyclicals and their timeliness in the present ecumenical era.

Pope Leo XIII — *"Fidentem Piumque"* (September 20, 1896)

Among his many rosary documents the six encyclicals from 1891 through 1896 constitute the most important legacy of Pope Leo XIII on the rosary. In *Fidentem piumque* 1896, the pope, preparing for death (although he was to live until 1903), restates in succinct fashion many of the doctrinal and devotional points of earlier letters, highlighting certain aspects which make the rosary a particularly effective prayer, especially perseverance and the value of being said in common. Moreover it is founded on the truth that the Mother of Jesus is mediatrix of all graces—even as the rosary pictures her bringing Jesus to Elizabeth, to the shepherds and Wise Men, to Simeon in the temple. The mysteries of the Rosary reminds us of our debt of gratitude to our Lady, and strengthen our faith by putting before us Jesus “author and finisher of faith.” Good Christians find here a true and constant life companion, adapted to all, no matter how little educated, no matter how busy, in illness and at death as well as in health. Once again the pope turns to our Lady to ask her intercession for the return of the dissidents to Roman unity, for she watched over the unity of the early Church in faith and charity.

Pope John XXIII — *"Grata Recordatio"* (September 26, 1959)

Following the great Marian Pope Pius XII, Pope John XXIII in the first year of his pontificate showed himself no less a protagonist of the Mother of God. Examples are the radio address, *Per cinque anni*, TPS 5 (Spring, 1959:2) pp. 149-52, November 21, 1958, to his former diocese of Venice, the letter, *Animo Nostro*, TPS 5 (Summer, 1959:3) pp. 328-30, January 25, 1959, to the Marian congress in Vietnam, and three messages for the closing of the Lourdes centenary. *Or fa un anno*, February 15, 1959, sermon at St. Mary Major, *La voix du Pape*, February 18, 1959, allocution in the Church of St. Louis of France, and by radio the address, *Très chers fils*, abstract in TPS 5 (Summer, 1959:3)290, February 18, 1959. The pope’s words to pilgrims from his native Bergamo, *Per ogni giorno*, TPS 5 (Spring, 1959:2), pp. 157-158, December 8, 1958, reflect his strong sense of our Lady’s protection: “Again it is she, our dear heavenly Mother, who fifty years later, as if to prepare Us for the grave responsibilities which awaited Us at this last stage of Our life, wished Us to have the unique honor of consecrating the huge underground Church at Lourdes which joins her name and that of Pius X in a single gesture of enthusiasm and love.” *Grata recordatio*, third of the pope’s encyclical letters, recommends devotion to Mary to the entire church, particularly through the rosary. The “pleasant recollection” (the opening words) concerns the rosary encyclicals of Leo XIII, familiar to Pope John in his youth. He warmly recalls the role of the rosary through his own life, and, repeating the advice of Pius XII’s encyclical, *Ingruentium malorum* of September 15, 1951, calls on all to pray to Mary for the pope, for the needs of the Church at home and abroad, for the peace of the world. Finally he suggests as special intentions the impending Roman synod and the announced ecumenical council with its goal of reunion.

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During Our pontificate We have often had the opportunity of bearing public testimony to that confidence and devotion toward the Blessed Virgin which We have had from Our tenderest years, and have endeavored to cherish and develop all Our life long. For having fallen upon times of calamity for Christendom and of peril for nations, We have realized how wise it is warmly to recommend the means of safeguarding welfare and peace which God has mercifully granted to men in the person of His august Mother, as the annals of the Church bear witness in every age. The zeal of Christian peoples has responded to Our desires and exhortations in many ways, most particularly by showing a devotion to the Rosary; and a plentiful harvest of excellent fruits has not been wanting.

Pope's confidence in our Lady

Still We can never have done with honoring the Mother of God, who is in truth “worthy of all praise,” and with urging love and affection toward her who is also the Mother of mankind, who is “full of mercy, full of grace.” Indeed, Our soul, wearied with the cares of the apostolate, the nearer it feels the time of Our departure to be at hand, with the more earnest confidence looks up to her from whom, as from a blessed dawn, arose the day of happiness and joy that was never to come to an end.

Excellence of the Rosary

It is a happiness for Us to remember, venerable brethren, that We have, in other letters issued from time to time, extolled the devotion of the Rosary; for it is in many ways most pleasing to her in whose honor it is employed, and most advantageous to those who properly use it. But it is equally a happiness to be able now to insist upon and confirm the same fact. Herein We have an excellent opportunity paternally to exhort men’s minds and hearts to an increase of religion, and to stimulate within them the hope of eternal reward.

The form of prayer We refer to bears the special name of “Rosary,” as though it represented by its arrangement the sweetness of roses and the charm of a garland. This is a most fitting method of venerating the Virgin, who is rightly styled the “mystical rose” of paradise, and who, as Queen of the universe, shines therein with a crown of stars. By its very name it appears to foreshadow and be an augury of the joys and garlands of heaven offered by her to those who are devoted to her.
Prayer of perseverance and prayer in common

This appears clearly if we consider the nature of the Rosary of our Lady. There is no duty which Christ and His Apostles more emphatically urged by both precept and example than prayer and supplication to Almighty God. The Fathers and Doctors in subsequent times have taught that this is a matter of such grave necessity that if men neglect it they look in vain for eternal salvation. Everyone who prays finds the door open to ask God’s blessings, both from the very nature of prayer and from the promises of Christ. Yet we all know that prayer derives its chief efficacy from two principal circumstances: untiring perseverance, and the union of many for one goal. The former is signified in those loving invitations of Christ: “Ask . . . seek . . . knock” (Matt. 7, 7); like a kind father who wishes to indulge the wishes of his children, yet enjoys being continually asked by them and, as it were, wearied by their prayers, in order to attach their hearts more closely to himself.

The second condition our Lord has borne witness to more than once: “I say to you further, that if two of you shall agree on earth about anything at all for which they ask, it shall be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18, 19-20). Hence that pregnant saying of Tertullian: “We gather into an assembly and congregation that we may, as it were, form an armed band and encompass God with our prayers;”¹ and the memorable words of Aquinas: “It is impossible that the prayers of many should not be heard, if one prayer is made up as it were out of many supplications.”²

Family Rosary

Both these qualities are conspicuous in the Rosary. For, to be brief, by repeating the same prayers we strenuously implore from our heavenly Father the kingdom of His grace and glory; we again and again beg the Virgin Mother to aid us sinners by her prayers, both during our whole life and especially at that last moment which is the stepping stone to eternity. The form of the Rosary, too, is excellently adapted to prayer in common, so that it has been styled, not without reason, “the psalter of Mary.” That old custom of our forefathers ought to be preserved or restored, whereby Christian families, whether in town or country, used to gather piously at the close of the day, when their labors were at an end, before a representation of Our Lady and alternately recite the Rosary. She, delighted at this faithful and unanimous homage, was ever near them like a loving mother surrounded by her children, distributing to them the blessings of domestic peace, foretaste of the peace of heaven.

Rosary in public

Considering the efficacy of this prayer in common, We, among the many other decrees which We have issued concerning the Rosary, have

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¹ Tertullian, *Apologet.*, c. 39.
² S. Thomas, *In evangel. Matth.* (Commentary on the gospel of S. Matthew), c. 18.
spoken thus: “It is Our wish that in the principal church of each diocese it should be recited daily, and that in parish churches it should be said on every feast day.” 3 Let this be constantly and devoutly carried out. We also see with joy the custom extended to other solemn occasions of public devotion and to pilgrimages to venerated shrines, the growing frequency of which is to be commended. This association of prayer and praise to Mary is a source at once of joy and of salvation for souls. We ourselves have most strongly experienced this — and Our heart rejoices to recall it — when at certain times in Our pontificate We have been present in the Vatican basilica, surrounded by great crowds of all classes who, united with Us in mind, voice, and hope, earnestly invoked by the mysteries and prayers of the Rosary her who is the most powerful patroness of whatever is called Catholic.

“Mediatrix to the Mediator”

Who could say or think that the confidence so strongly felt in the patronage and protection of the Blessed Virgin is excessive? Most certainly the name and attributes of the perfect Mediator belong to no other than Christ; for He alone, at once God and man, restored the human race to the favor of the heavenly Father: “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all, bearing witness in his own time” (1Tim. 2, 5-6). And yet, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, “There is no reason why certain others should not be called in a certain way mediators between God and man, that is to say, insofar as they cooperated by predisposing and ministering in the union of man with God.” 4 Such are the angels and saints in heaven, the prophets and priests of both Testaments; but especially has the Blessed Virgin a greater claim to the glory of this title. For no single individual can even be imagined who has ever contributed or ever will contribute so much toward reconciling man with God. She offered a Savior to mankind, hastening to eternal ruin, at that moment when she received the announcement of the mystery of peace brought to this earth by the angel, with that admirable act of consent — and this, “in the name of the whole human race.” 5 She it is “from whom Jesus was born;” she is therefore truly His Mother, and for this reason a worthy and acceptable “Mediatrix to the Mediator.”

Our debt to Mary

As the various mysteries present themselves for the recollection and meditation of the faithful, they also elucidate what we owe to Mary for our reconciliation and salvation. No one can fail to be impressed with this agreeable duty when considering her who appeared in the house of Elizabeth as the minister of divine gifts, who presented her Son to the shepherds, to the kings, and to Simeon. Moreover, one must remember

5. Summa theologica, III, q. 30, a.1.
that the blood of Christ shed for our sake, and those members in which He offers to His Father the wounds He received, "the price of our liberty," are nothing else than the flesh and blood of the Virgin. For "the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary, and however much it was exalted in the glory of His Resurrection, nevertheless, the nature of His flesh derived from Mary remained and still remains the same."6

Rosary strengthens faith

Yet another excellent fruit comes from the Rosary, exceedingly opportune to the character of our times. This We have referred to elsewhere. It is that, while the virtue of divine faith is daily exposed to so many dangers and attacks, the Christian may from the Rosary derive nourishment and strength for his faith. The Scriptures call Christ "the author and finisher of faith" (Heb. 12, 2); "the author" because He taught men many things which they must believe, especially about Himself in whom "dwell all the fullness of the Godhead" (Col. 2, 9), and also because He mercifully gives the power of believing by the grace and, as it were, the unction of the Holy Spirit; "the finisher" because in heaven, where He will change the virtue of faith into the splendor of glory, He openly discloses those things which men have seen in this mortal life as through a veil.

Now Christ stands forth clearly in the Rosary. We behold in meditation His life, whether the joyful events of His hidden life, or His public life in excessive toil and sufferings unto death, or His glorious life from His triumphant Resurrection to His eternal enthronement at the right hand of the Father. And since faith, to be full and sufficient, must display itself — "for with the heart a man believes unto justice, and with the mouth profession of faith is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10, 10) — so have we also in the Rosary an excellent means for this, for by those vocal prayers with which it is intermingled we are enabled to express and profess our faith in God (our most provident Father), in the future life, the forgiveness of sins; in the mysteries of the august Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the divine maternity, and others. All know the value and merit of faith. For faith is like a valuable seed, producing the blossoms of all virtues by which we are here pleasing to God, and hereafter bringing forth fruits that will last forever: "for to know thee is perfect justice, and to know thy justice and thy power is the root of immortality" (Wisd. 15, 3).

Penance and the Rosary

This is the place to add a remark in regard to the obligations of those virtues which faith rightly demands. Among them is the virtue of penance, and one part of this is abstinence, which for more reasons than one is necessary and salutary. It is true that the Church is growing more

6. De assumpt, B.V.M., c. 5 (On the Assumption of the B.V.M.) - among the works of St, Augustine (PL 40, c. 1145), but actually by an unknown author, probably of the early twelfth century.
indulgent towards her children in this matter, but they must understand they are bound to be solicitous in making up for such maternal indulgence by other good works. For this reason we are happy to propose particularly the use of the Rosary, which is capable of producing "worthy fruits of penance," especially by the remembrance of the sufferings of Christ and His Mother.

To those, therefore, who are striving after the goal of true happiness, this help of the Rosary has been most providentially offered, and it is one unsurpassed in facility and convenience for all. For any person even moderately instructed in his religion can make use of it easily and profitably, and the time it takes cannot interfere with anyone's occupation. Sacred history abounds with striking and evident examples: it is well known that there have been many persons occupied in most weighty functions or absorbed in laborious cares, who have never omitted for a single day this pious practice.

**Companion of the Christian**

Combined with this advantage is that inward sentiment of devotion which attracts minds to the Rosary, so that they love it as the intimate companion and faithful protector of life; and in their last agony they hold fast to it as the dear pledge of the "unfading crown of glory" (I Pet. 4, 4). Such a pledge is greatly enhanced by the benefits of sacred indulgences, if properly employed; for the devotion of the Rosary has been richly endowed with such indulgences by Our predecessors and Ourselves. These favors will certainly prove most efficacious to both the dying and the departed, being bestowed as it were by the hand of the merciful Virgin, in order that they may the sooner enjoy the eternal peace and light they have desired.

**Prayer for reunion**

These considerations, venerable brethren, strongly urge Us never to cease extolling and recommending to Catholic peoples this excellent and most salutary form of devotion. Yet another very urgent reason, of which We have often spoken in both letters and allocutions, encourages Us to do this. For that earnest desire, which We have learnt from the divine Heart of Jesus, of fostering the work of reconciliation among those who are separated from us, daily urges Us more pressingly to action; and We are convinced that this reunion cannot be better prepared and strengthened than by the power of prayer.

The example of Christ is before us, for in order that His disciples might be "one" in faith and charity, He poured forth prayer and supplication to His Father. And concerning the efficacious prayer of His most holy Mother for the same end, there is a striking testimony in the Acts of the Apostles. Therein is described the first assembly of the disciples, expecting with earnest hope and prayer the promised fullness of the Holy Spirit. And the presence of Mary, united with them in prayer, is especially indicated: "All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1, 14).
Wherefore, as the infant Church rightly joined itself in prayer with her as the patroness and most excellent custodian of unity, so in these times is it most opportune to do the same all over the Catholic world, particularly during the whole month of October, which We long ago decreed to be dedicated and consecrated, by the solemn devotion of the Rosary, to the Mother of God, in order to implore her help for the afflicted Church. Let, then, zeal for this prayer be rekindled everywhere, particularly for the end of holy unity. Nothing will be more agreeable and acceptable to Mary; for, as she is most closely united with Christ, she especially wishes and desires that they who have received the gift of the same baptism instituted by Him also be united with Him and with one another in the faith and perfect charity.

So may the sublime mysteries of this same faith be more deeply impressed in men's minds by means of the Rosary devotion, with the happy result that "we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise."

Meanwhile, as a pledge of the divine favor and of Our affection, We most lovingly impart to you, your clergy, and your people, the apostolic blessing.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, the twentieth day of September, in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-six, the nineteenth of Our pontificate.

The original text of this encyclical is in the *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 29 (1896-97) 204-209. The English translation above is an adaptation of that originally published in *The Tablet* (London).
"Grata Recordatio"
Pope John XXIII

September 26, 1959

To the Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See: On Piously Reciting the Rosary Especially during the Month of October

JOHN XXIII
VENERABLE BRETHREN
GREETINGS AND APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION

Among the pleasant recollections of Our younger days are the Encyclicals which Pope Leo XIII used to write to the whole Catholic world as the month of October drew near, in order to urge the faithful to devout recitation of Mary’s rosary during that month in particular.¹

These Encyclicals had varied contents, but they were all very wise, vibrant with fresh inspiration, and directly relevant to the practice of the Christian life. In strong and persuasive terms they exhorted Catholics to pray to God in a spirit of faith through the intercession of Mary, His Virgin Mother, by reciting the holy rosary. For the rosary is a very commendable form of prayer and meditation. In saying it we weave a mystic garland of Ave Maria’s, Pater Noster’s and Gloria Patri’s. And as we recite these vocal prayers, we meditate upon the principal mysteries of our religion; the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Redemption of the human race are proposed, one event after another, for our consideration.

Pope John’s Devotion to the Rosary

These pleasant memories of Our younger days have not faded or vanished as the years of Our life have passed. On the contrary, We want to declare in complete frankness and simplicity that the years have made Mary’s rosary all the dearer to Us. We never fail to recite it each day in

its entirety and We intend to recite it with particular devotion during the coming month.

During Our first year as pope — a year which is almost over — We have several times had occasion to urge the clergy and laity to public and private prayer. But today We make this same request with even greater emphasis and earnestness, for reasons which this Encyclical will set out very briefly.

This coming October will mark the end of the first year since the saintly departure of Our predecessor, Pius XII, from this mortal life in which he had distinguished himself by so many glorious achievements.

Twenty days after his death, We, though all unworthy were raised to the Sovereign Pontificate in accord with God’s mysterious designs.

An unbroken succession

One pope bequeathed, as it were, to another pope, as a sacred legacy, the care of the whole Christian flock; with the same pastoral concern each of them declared his paternal love for all mankind.

These two events — the one full of sorrow, the other full of joy — attest clearly to the world that while all things human gradually decline and decay, the Roman Pontificate withstands the rush of centuries, even though the visible Heads of the Church must, one after another, leave this mortal exile as they complete the span of days which God in His providence has set for them.

But all Christians should turn their thoughts to the late Pope Pius XII and to his lowly successor, in whom Blessed Peter continues his eternal mission as supreme pastor, and they should address this prayer to God: “To preserve in holy religion the Pope, and all clerics in holy orders, we beg Thee hear us.”

A call to the rosary

And now it is a pleasure also to recall that this same Predecessor of Ours urged all the faithful to pious recitation of the rosary during October in the Encyclical Ingruentium malorum. We would like to repeat one admonition from the Encyclical: “Turn in spirit with ever greater confidence to the Virgin Mother of God, the constant refuge of Christians in adversity, since she ‘has been made a source of salvation for the human race.’”

II

On October 11, 1959, We shall have the great pleasure of presenting mission crucifixes to a large group of Catholic missionaries who are about
to leave their beloved homes and undertake the heavy responsibility of bringing the light of Christianity to distant people.⁶ On the same day, in the afternoon, We are scheduled to visit the North American College on the Janiculum and there joyously celebrate with its superiors, faculty, and seminarians the completion of that college's first century.⁷

Although these two celebrations fall only by coincidence on the same day, they have the same meaning and importance: in all that she does the Catholic Church is motivated by heaven's inspiration and drawn on by the principles and precepts of eternal truth; all of her children contribute with a selfless and dynamic will to mutual respect, the fraternal union of mankind, and solid peace.

Hope for the future

These young men present such a wonderful spectacle that We must be optimistic for the future. They have overcome many obstacles and inconveniences and given themselves to God that other men might gain Christ,⁸ whether in foreign lands as yet untouched by the light of truth or in those immense, noisy, and busy cities in which the pace of daily activity, rapid as a whirlwind, sometimes makes souls wither and become content with earthly goods. From the lips of their elders, who have labored long in the same cause, comes the ardent prayer of the Prince of the Apostles: “Grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness.”⁹

We trust that the apostolic labors of these young men will be commended to the Virgin Mary in your devout prayers through the month of October.

III

There is another matter also which compels Us to ask that the Sacred College of Cardinals, you, Venerable Brethren, all priests and nuns, the sick and disabled, our innocent children, and all Christians address earnest and suppliant prayers to Jesus Christ and His most loving Mother. It is this: that those who, in great measure, hold the future of nations in their hands consider attentively the dangerous pass to which our age has come. Be these nations large or small, their legitimate rights and their inheritance of spiritual riches are sacred and must be safeguarded.

A prayer for rulers

Therefore We pray God that their rulers may carefully weigh and consider the causes of dissension and endeavor in good faith to remove them. They must, above all, realized that war (God keep it from us!) can have only one result — vast ruins everywhere, and thus cannot be the object of anyone’s reliance. They must adapt to the needs of men of today the laws which regulate the state and society and which bind together nations and

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⁶ A précis of the talk given on this occasion appears in TPS (Winter 1959-60), v. 6, No. 1, 46.
⁷ A translation of the talk given on this occasion appears in TPS (Winter, 1959-60), v. 6, No.1, 37-42.
⁸ Cf. Phil. 3, 8.
⁹ Acts 4, 29.
classes of society. They must be mindful of the eternal laws which come from God and are the bases and pivots of all government. Finally, they must be ever aware that the individual souls of men are created by God and destined to possess and enjoy Him.

**False philosophies**

It must also be remarked that there are current today certain schools of thought and philosophy and certain attitudes toward the practical conduct of life which cannot possibly be reconciled with the teachings of Christianity. This impossibility We shall never cease from asserting in firm and unambiguous, though also calm, terms.

But God wishes the welfare of men and of nations!10

And so We hope that men will set aside those sterile postulates and assumptions, hard as rock and just as inflexible, which rise from a way of thinking and acting that is infected with laicism and materialism, and that they will find a complete cure in that sound doctrine which experience makes more certain with every day that passes. We mean that doctrine which attests that God is the author of life and its laws, that He is guarantor of the rights and dignity of the human person. God then is “our refuge and our Redemption.”11

**The coming of God’s Kingdom**

Our thoughts turn to all the lands of this earth. We see all mankind striving for a better future; We see the awakening of a mysterious force, and this permits Us to hope that men will be drawn by a right conscience and a sense of duty to advance the real interests of human society. That this goal may be realized in the fullest sense — that is, with the triumph of the Kingdom of truth, justice, peace, and charity — We exhort all Our children in Christ to be “of one heart and one soul”12 and to pour out ardent prayers in October to our Queen in heaven and our loving Mother, reflecting upon the words of the Apostles: “In all things we suffer tribulation, but we are not distressed; we are sore pressed, but we are not destitute; we endure persecution, but we are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we do not perish; always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame.”13

**The Synod and the Council**

Before We conclude this Encyclical We also wish to ask you, Venerable Brethren, to recite Mary’s rosary through the month of October with particular devotion, and to entreat the Virgin Mother of God in suppliant prayer, for another intention which is dear to Our heart: that the Roman Synod may bring many blessings and benefits upon this city; that the

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13. *2 Cor.* 4, 8-10.
forthcoming Ecumenical Council, in which you will participate by your presence and your advice, will add wondrous growth to the universal Church; and that the renewed vigor of all the Christian virtues which We hope this Council will produce will also serve as an invitation and incentive to reunion for Our Brethren and children who are separated from this Apostolic See.

In this fond hope, We lovingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to each and every one of you, Venerable Brethren, to the flocks entrusted to your care, and to those individuals especially who will respond to Our entreaties in a devout and zealous spirit.

Given at Rome, in St. Peter's, on the 26th day of September, in the year 1959, the first of Our Pontificate.

Pope John XXIII

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The above English translation is taken from *The Pope Speaks Magazine* (Winter 1959-60) v. 6, 1, 68-72.
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