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The learning Church

or

What the world teaches the church

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Introduction

I am very happy to join in felicitating Prof. Lieve Troch of the Netherlands on her 60th birthday. She has been associated for over two decades in helping in the theological development in Asia, principally in Sri Lanka. She has advanced new perspectives in feminist theology. In doing so she has helped many persons to find fulfilment in their personal lives also. She has been a live wire in linking persons from Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. Her professorial chairs in Brazil and Nymegen have been an asset in bringing together theological students and researchers from these continents. Her approach is friendly, scholarly and challenging to the seekers to go further in their quest. She is in the forefront in feminist theology. She is also been open to inter-religious dialogue, meditation and action together for the common good.

In the process, she has not been without her share of the cross that progressive theologians have to face even in a country like the Netherlands. For four years or more she had to face the suspicion of the ecclesiastical authorities who, as it were withdrew, her license for teaching in a Catholic

theological faculty.

Much of the contents of my article I have discussed with her at different times and am grateful to her for her understanding approach to our Asian concerns.

A Learning Church

In his inauguration homily Pope Benedict XVI said: “My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen with the whole church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.”

In reflecting on the history of the Church we may ask whether and how the Church has been listening to the word and will of the Lord throughout the past 20 centuries. What are the new challenges facing Christians today in the context of our history and the global future?

The teaching of Jesus is explained clearly in the four gospels. His message is that God is love, a loving Father of all humanity. God’s one commandment is that we love God and love one another. This love is to be merciful, compassionate and caring for all irrespective of all barriers of race, gender, social class or creed. It has to be sincere, truthful, peace loving and universal, forgiving even enemies.

“Love your enemies, and pray for your persecutors, only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike...” (Matt. 5, 44-45). “Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father’s house in heaven” (Matt. 6:1).

This was a new message of salvation for all – for each one according to one’s behaviour. It was not linked to any religion, doctrinal definitions or ritual practices.

The Acts of the Apostles describes the life and teaching of the early Church after the crucifixion of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles led by Peter spoke boldly of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth., first to the Jews and later to the gentile people. The apostles preached that Jesus, who was killed by the Jewish religious leaders and officials of the Roman Empire, has been raised by God. They presented Jesus in different ways: as the expected Lord and Messiah, a prophet, a saviour of the people, the anointed one of God, the Son of Man, Son of God. The apostles were arrested and put in prison... flogged and ordered to give up speaking in the name of Jesus. But they continued bearing witness to Jesus.

Peter invited those who believed to be baptized “and some three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2,41). The Acts continues to describe the life of the followers of Jesus. “They met constantly to hear

the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray [...]. All whose faith had drawn them together held every-thing in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required [...]. And day by day the Lord added to their number those whom he had saved" (Acts 2, 42-47).

They were mindful of the simple life style and message of Jesus, who as an adult had no place to lay his head. He sent out his apostles and disciples "to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Take nothing with you, neither staff nor pack, neither bread nor money, not even a second coat" (Luke 9,3).

We can think of how the Christians spread among the Jews and throughout the then Roman Empire despite the persecutions during the first three centuries. The disciples of Jesus were following his teachings of the kingdom of God. Their understanding of discipleship of Jesus and salvation was closely linked to common prayer, the breaking of bread and sharing their possessions. The Jesus teaching thus had a strong message of social justice and meeting the needs of all specially the poor. It had a spiritual appeal to the people of the time. Their alternative inspirations as from the Jewish Old testament, the state religion of the time including emperor worship and natural reasoning were not so attractive spiritually. Christianity though persecuted was appealing to the seekers of meaning in life.

During the first three centuries the numbers of Christians increased throughout the Roman Empire, that ensured a relative peace and good communications throughout the Mediterranean region. With the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 312, Christianity become an accepted religion in the Empire. From being a small minority in 312, Christians came to form the majority in the Roman Empire by the end the 4th century.

Medieval Civilization

The Catholic Church was the main spiritual and civilizing influence in Western Europe, throughout the Middle Ages, usually understood as the millennium covering the period from the 5th century to the end of the 15th century, or from the Council of Chalcedon 451 to the discovery of the Americas in 1492. It is an age of many saints and scholars, Popes and Kings, of cathedrals and universities, of monasteries, popular piety and pilgrimages, of scholasticism and the openness to Greek learning in contact with Islamic scholars, the Renaissance, the rise of nation states, of dissent, the Crusades and the Inquisition, of the split of the Western and Eastern Churches, the Black Death. Throughout the medieval period the Church was a major influence in the learning and culture of the European peoples. She helped in the formation of the European nation states.

My intention here is not to study the Medieval period as such but to ask how the Church reacted to the changed world situation after 1492 and what could be the causes of such reactions. While appreciating the great achievements of the period I wish to note some developments that were not in keeping with the teachings of Jesus and the early Church.

Some Contrasts of Modern Catholicism and the Apostolic Church

1. During the four and half centuries after 1492 the European peoples dominated much of the rest of the world with their military and economic power. They could thus take away the resources of poor people in the colonies to build up the riches of the rulers. The European colonial invasions after 1492 led to the virtual extermination of many of the native peoples of the Americas and Oceania. This is the greatest genocide of human history.

In the process a world system was built up enriching the economies of the more powerful European peoples. The Europeans virtually drew the map of the modern world taking the best lands and resources for their settlement in the Americas and Oceania. This is the greatest migration in human history.

This was accompanied with the forced transfer and life long exploitation of tens of millions of Black Africans as slaves to the "new world". The ensuing world system has since been consolidated as international law (which is a system of intentional lawlessness, based on their military and political power and legal acumen).

Since the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity in the early fourth century, the Church was linked to the political powers in Western Europe. For a long time the main leadership of the Church has been from the Western (European) countries and of the white race. Up to recent times the Church has been supportive of Euro - American colonialism including slavery and the suppression of the indigenous peoples and their religions and cultures. This was associated to their conviction of the superiority of the Western peoples and of their unique Christian mission to civilize and save the rest of the world. Even now though the majority of the Catholics are in the Continents of the South, the administrative and teaching leadership of the Church is from the Western countries.

In those centuries of colonialism and wars for colonies, the Church neglected the core gospel message of love of God and of neighbour. Perhaps the doctrinal distortion that made Christianity church-centred led them to think that they were doing something right and good in spreading the Christian religion even by the use of force and political and cultural domination.

Jesus stressed the inherent worth and value of all human beings as

children of the loving God, irrespective of their race, gender, social class and religious affiliations.

Some Christians helped the oppressed peoples through their educational and social services. Thus Bartolomue de las Casas, and some religious groups opposed the abuses of colonialism, and of slavery. But the Church as a whole did not contest the colonial system as such.

2. Another noteworthy contrast between the early Church and the Catholic Church of the mid 20th century was the absence of social justice and practical action for sharing in incomes and wealth in the emerging modern global society. It was difficult to expect a large scale sharing of goods among all Christians as in the early Church. This may be an ideal that may not be realized voluntarily by large numbers of persons for a long period of time and over a wide area of lands. But what is distressing is that in the period since 1492, Christian peoples from the Western countries spread their areas of control to cover much of the open land spaces of the world. Whereas the Jesus teaching was love of the neighbour, in modern times the Christians have been partners of the invading Western powers. Instead of preaching the kingdom of God according to the values of Jesus, they have helped transform the map of the world into a Western European dominated globe, with the participation of the Church and many Christians.

3. Whereas Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, urging them to do likewise, the Catholic Church had by then been set up as a hierarchical organization with the Pope as primate and the Bishops as the heads of the dioceses. The male clergy dominated the rest of the faithful. The colonial land grab and colonial rule aggravated the corruption and injustice of the relatively affluent Europe. There was a significant amount of corruption and nepotism in the Church too. All these led to schisms and efforts at reform as by the medieval dissenters like Savonarola of Florence. The Church used secular power and agencies like the Inquisition to suppress heresy, dissent and even attempts at meaningful reforms. The Protestant Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in 1517 is a lasting consequence of this situation.

4. Women were among more faithful disciples of Jesus in his time of trial, torture and crucifixion. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was the closest companion of Jesus in his life and teaching and was his chief associate and mourner under the cross at Calvary. Women were the first witnesses to his resurrection and participants in the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church, on the other hand has claimed that the male is closer to the divine since Jesus Christ is male and is God. On this basis women have been excluded from ordination to the priesthood and from the exercise of hierarchical authority in the Church. Women are considered unworthy to preside at the Eucharistic table and invoke the presence of Jesus among

the community of prayer and the breaking of bread. They are excluded from the leadership of the liturgy and in teaching functions. Though the Protestant Churches have women priests and bishops, the Catholic Church still affirms that she cannot admit women to the priesthood.

The secular world is teaching a lesson to the Church in that there are women rulers of nations, elected legislators, judges and administrators at all levels. The Church is still far from accepting the equal rights of women in Church life. This is somewhat strange and ironic since the Catholic Church honours Mary the Mother of Jesus as the Immaculate Mother of God, and Queen of Heaven.

5. The criterion that Jesus gave for goodness of life and eternal salvation was the love of God and neighbour. He did not make salvation depend on any religious authority, on accepting any doctrinal propositions or observance of any ritual. He wanted an inner transformation of mind and heart of his disciples and an actual love for others leading to sharing in life. He was opposed to hypocrisy in any religion, but not to persons of other beliefs as such.

It is a sad fact of history that the Catholic Church did not respect, during the past centuries since Constantine, the other religions or faith beliefs of different peoples. Once freed from persecutions by the Roman Emperors, Christians tended to regard themselves as God's representatives on earth with authority, mission and power to convert the others to Christianity. The later attitude of the Church towards other religions was that they were superstitious, false, pagan and obstacles to the one true faith. These were unable to save humans from damnation and hence had to be regarded as obstacles to salvation. In the process, though the core teaching of Jesus is love of one another, Christianity has perhaps the longest record of religious intolerance and the largest number of persons and groups opposed, condemned and eliminated by a religious group in human history.

On the other hand, have not some other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism (and moral philosophies like Confucianism) a noble and gentler tradition of tolerance and respect for other religions.

Does this not imply that something has gone wrong in the interpretation of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who came to give life and life in fullness to all? Has this a relationship to the Church's claim of being the possessors of the truth regarding God and human salvation? This sad record is also an argument in favour of the value of dissent within the Catholic Church, for dissent could be and has been a means of the Church's correction and conversion to the genuine authentic message of Jesus. The earlier general attitude of the Church authorities towards dissent has been one of intolerance and opposition. How could such a distortion of the teachings of Jesus have taken place from the early centuries and continued

for so long till the modern age?

The Church has had to change this view specially when she became aware of the dissent within the Church and the existence of several other religions and civilizations that have benefited humanity. Hence she accepted, at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), that God can and does lead persons to goodness and salvation through the other religions also, and that, in ways known only to the Divine Spirit. This advance is making her change her concept of mission from one of conversion of others to Catholic Christianity to one of dialogue with others and action together for the common good of humanity. This lesson was learnt over a very long period of time and in a hard way. It has included the earlier condemnation of many who dissented from the exclusivist doctrine that salvation is only through the Catholic Church. This would mean that the vast numbers of humanity before and after Christ would not be saved. This cannot be reconciled with the Jesus teaching on God as love and of Matthew 25 on the last judgement.

The diverse reality of the human race also taught her this lesson of basic human goodness and of God's universal love. Its full implications have not yet been graciously acknowledged by the teaching authority of the Church as seen in the Document "Dominus Jesus" of the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith (CDF) of 2000.

Jesus was himself for the purification of the Jewish religion of the day. He struggled against the wrong interpretations of the law and the prophets that had ended in imposing unnecessary burdens on the mass of the people in the name of religion. The teaching of Jesus is very much concerning the moral life inspired by the love of God. The dogmatic definitions of later Christianity are not found as such in his teaching. At the same time much of the simple evangelical teaching of Jesus has not been given an adequately significant place in the presentations of doctrinal theology during many centuries, in the formal teaching of the Church as through the Councils, and later on seminaries and the universities.

6. Corresponding to these issues is the experience of the Catholic Church in having to learn from the world concerning sexuality and moral responsibility. The Church has contributed very much to the promotion and safeguarding of the family as the basic unit of society. However on the question of the use of contraceptives, many married couples are not accepting the ruling given by the Vatican in *Humane Vitae* in 1968 condemning the use of contraceptives. Now many Catholics themselves are determining their norms concerning human sexuality and married life. It is likely the Church will have to accept this as a *de facto* situation, or else the alienation of families from the Catholic Church, especially in the West, will grow with the succeeding generations. Already many Catholics do not

celebrate their marriages in the Church.

7. Slavery was accepted by the Church along with colonialism, and even earlier. Much of the thrust for the freedom of slaves came from the movements of the slaves themselves, supported by persons of good will such as Wilberforce and Abraham Lincoln. In general the Church has not been in the forefront for reforms unjust social structures. She learned of the rights of workers from the workers movements, and from the Socialists and Marxists. But earlier the Church has been opposed to Socialism as materialistic, while being long allied to Capitalism that has been the dominant system in most of the world in the past few centuries. This is one of the reasons, as Pope Pius XI lamented, for the Church's loss of the working classes in the West during the 19th century.

Democracy, as a way of political management has been far from the traditions of the Church. The traditional teaching of the Church was that authority was from God and communicated to the ruler of the State and the ruling authority of the Church, the Pope. It was a top down system of power, that could not accept that legitimacy of power could be based on the will of the masses of the subjects. Thus the Catholic Church was opposed to many of the thinkers and leaders of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution of 1789. It took many decades for the Church to accept that people could constitute a legitimate democratic government. Mary's Magnificat goes much further than the claims of the democratic ideology. The words attributed to Mary are truly revolutionary: "He has pulled down the princes from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1,46-53).

In the government of the Church the notion of the laity's participation in the echelons of the administration is still not readily accepted. The Church begins with the premise that God has established the male hierarchy in power in the Church. The Church does not still accept that the use of power in religious matters also is subject to accountability to the people or subjects. Hence the laity are generally excluded from the exercise of higher authority in the Church.

At present there is drastic reduction in the numbers of ordained clergy in the West. They are ageing and there is a paucity of vocations to the priesthood. Seminaries are being closed due to lack of students. The Vatican authorities are reluctant to consider the ordination of women to the priesthood, or even optional celibacy for the ordained priests. The Church has much to learn from the secular world on the equal dignity of women and men and on the potential role of the laity in the Church.

8. The Church had had to learn from human society about the potentiality of science and reason to correct some interpretations of the Bible

concerning the universe and the origin of the human race. Thus the famous case of Galileo about the relation of the earth to the sun. Galileo was made to abjure his views in 1633, and was under house arrest till his death in 1642. Pope John Paul II acknowledged in 1979 and 1989 Galileo's bad treatment at the hands of the theologians, without however, specifying or retracting the theological errors involved in the matter or the role of the Popes in its outcome. Pope John Paul II apologized on over a hundred occasions for the short comings, as he said, of the sons and daughters of the Church.

The story of human origin in Genesis would imply that all humans are descended from one pair of first parents, Adam and Eve. Today scientists may question this in favour of a theory of evolution, though there may be difficulties in reconciling it with the Church's teaching on original sin.

This reflection shows that the Catholic Church has had to correct herself on several issues during the course of the centuries. Some such issues are the claim that the Catholic Church is the:

- a) sole possessor of the truth about God, ignoring that the Spirit of God is present to all persons, cultures and historical events and processes
- b) is the unique and necessary path to human salvation.
- c) can marginalize women in Church and society and exclude them from decision making. An authoritarian male hierarchy has been set up for the whole Church.
- d) can have recourse to violence as a means of spreading the faith,
- e) can adopt authoritarian ways of suppressing dissent on doctrines.
- f) can tolerate and even encourage colonial imperialist policies and profit from them.
- g) teaches that the way to human salvation depends on amends made to God the Father for the sins of humanity by Jesus Christ by his death on the cross. This view overlooked the social mission of Jesus in working for the liberation of the oppressed. The Church accordingly stressed works of charity but neglected action for social justice and the reform of the social structures within countries and the world at large. On this basis Christian spirituality encouraged humble acceptance of domination by others, as a way of discipleship of Jesus who accepted suffering even unto death on the cross, it is said, to make amends to the Father for the sins of humanity.
- h) Due to this perspective the spiritual life was interpreted more as a flight from the world rather than as a commitment to realise the kingdom of God on earth. During over 15 centuries, till recently, the accent in Christian spirituality was more on charity and works of mercy rather than social justice. There was no insistence on the need of reforming the unjust world order which Christians helped to set

up. Thus even at the beginning of the 21st century Euro-Americans control most of the land and resources of the world, forgetful of the core teaching of Jesus on sharing with the needy.

- i) The liturgy was made more a ritual than an expression and experience of the love of God and neighbour. Thousands of Holy Masses can be celebrated in a country without any serious reflection on and impact on social justice in a world of great inequalities and armed conflicts. Prayer and meditation can be, de facto, indifferent to unjust social realities and to gross violations of human rights.
- j) Such Christian thinking has misdirected the powerful Western civilization from the mission of love and humble sharing to one of arrogant intolerance, conquest and conversion of others to an exclusivist Christian religion. Hence the segregating of Christians as God's chosen people, privileged by revelation and graces for salvation. Intolerance of other religions leading to destruction of their places of worship, burning their sacred writings, despising their cultures, and regarding such actions as good deeds to promote this Christianity, considered the one true religion.

Modern Christianity against the Gospel Message

The core teaching of Jesus according to the gospels and the preaching of the early Church is that God is love, and asks us to love one another and thus reach eternal salvation. As the Catholic Church evolved over the centuries up to modern times, she has been doing immense good. She has inspired many saints and scholars during these twenty centuries. But she has also been involved in some of the worst evils in human history such as:

- a) the invasion and conquest of other peoples especially the natives of the Americas , Oceania and of Africa and much of Asia. Genocide.
- b) The Church has been opposed to other religions and faiths, and responsible for the most widespread and long standing intolerance and violence against other religions.
- c) The Church has marginalized women as inferior to men in status and rights.
- d) The Church has legitimized the setting up of the present world order of great inequality among persons and peoples, using violence and unfair trade practices.

To some extent this very process has brought about the de-Christianization of the Western peoples, leading towards an end of the clerical church and of the religious life in the West.

This distortion of the Christian message could not have come about un-

der the inspiration of Jesus and the initial gospel message. What were then the new elements in Christian doctrine that would have legitimized such evils? The Western Christians may not have experienced the effects of such doctrines and actions as evil. In fact the doctrines that were taught as the faith during 1500 years of the Middle Ages, were handed down from generation to generation as orthodox doctrine, with even the greatest scholars such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas elaborating on them, adding the weight of tradition to them.

Some of the elements of this 1500 year Christian orthodoxy were:

- a) the doctrine of the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and the consequent deprival of grace that related them positively to God. The contamination of all humanity by "Original Sin" that needed a divine redeemer to make amends to God and reconcile humanity with God.
- b) No salvation outside the Church.
- d) The liturgy is *ex opera operata*, irrespective of response of the participants
- c) Conversion to the Catholic Church is the goal of mission, even by resort to violence
- e) Scripture and Tradition are the source of divine revelation
- f) The Church hierarchy is the legitimate interpreter of divine revelation, and guarantor of orthodoxy.
- g) Other religions are false and do not have right to freedom of expression and propagation

The Christians of the West were accustomed to accepting these doctrines as orthodox tradition during many centuries. Thus the Nicene Creed of 325 is still repeated regularly at the Eucharist on Sundays throughout the Christian world, has no reference to the core teachings of Jesus on love, sharing, justice and concern for the other. But it is rather a repetition of formulations concerning the divinity, elaborated in hardly intelligible Greek philosophical terminology.

They benefited from it, specially the males. Most females too were long attuned to them, till recent decades. The Asian and African peoples who have their own religions, with their own sacred writings and religious traditions, raise questions as to whether this Christian tradition was truly from Jesus Christ and the God of Love preached by him. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that such a God would condemn their ancestors to eternal damnation. Why should God wait for many millennia (till 2000 years ago) after creation to send Jesus as the unique saviour of humankind? Why should Christians and their God be so cruel to non Europeans? Could they not appreciate the spiritual wisdom and cultural treasures of the other

ancient religions and peoples? We may ask whether contemporary presentations of Christian revelation do not need a purification in terms of return to the core values of Jesus?

This leads us to evolve a principle of evaluating Christian doctrines and even other religions, from the core teachings of Jesus and early Christianity. Since we believe that all that is good in the world comes from God we can infer that everything that is truly humanising and ennobling in any religion or ideology is also ultimately from the same divine source, and must be respected as such. God wills happiness and fulfilment of all persons and peoples. We can conclude from this that more a religion is truly leading to genuine self-realisation and fulfilment of all persons and peoples, i.e. it helps the resolution of personal problems of individuals as well as improves the societal relations of groups, the closer is it to the divine source.

This principle of evaluation and critique is in the first instance a rational and ethical one. In that sense it can be presented and applied to any religion and ideology. It is based also on the central teaching of Jesus. It takes the core message of Jesus seriously and makes it the touchstone of Christian theology. This principle of critique affirms God as revealed in Jesus Christ as a God of love. It is an affirmation of the centrality of universal love which is made a measuring rod of the authenticity of any sacred text, church teaching or practice.

It helps to liberate Christian theologies from presentations of God that are unfaithful to the teaching of Jesus eg. on God as intolerant, partial, cruel and fostering inhumanity, dehumanisation and exploitation of human beings and so called wars for civilisation. It does oblige us to see deeper into the origins of certain theological teachings and practices which cannot be from God and Jesus and are of purely human sectarian sources, including imagination, concerning the Divine that is beyond human knowledge.

In the background of such a violent and intolerant past, allied to the powers that be, how are Christians to evaluate our past theology and policies? Can we agree that such intolerant actions were not according to God's will? How were Christians motivated to make such grievous mistakes, and that for so long? Did the Church really listen to the word of God, as for instance the teaching of Jesus in the gospels? Or were they motivated by the desire for power and wealth? How can we avoid similar situations in the future?

We have to become a learning Church

Acknowledging Jesus as the messenger of God we can develop Christian theology on the basis of the core teaching of Jesus and of the example in his life as narrated in the gospels. We have to evaluate critically the

Fall - Redemption doctrine, and give more value to the positive goodness of human nature in all, despite human limitations and inclination to sin. We should recognize the love of God for all humans whatever a person's gender, race or culture.

We can reflect on our failures of the past as well as ask ourselves why there is so much of increasing distancing of Christians from the practices of the Church. There has been a spread of secularism specially in the Western countries of Europe, North America and Oceania. Some churches are being closed down as the numbers attending services are not sufficient to maintain them. The numbers of the clergy is also decreasing, and the few who remain are ageing. They cannot provide for the traditional needs of the laity, nor are the laity seeking their services. Now often the remaining clergy have to go in search of the lay Christians instead of the believers coming to the clergy for regular services. The sacraments, such as Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist are not frequented much in the Western countries as in former times. Even marriages are performed more as a legal function than as a Church sacrament and rite. This situation has been growing since the 1950s. In 1977 I wrote in my book on "Eucharist and Human Liberation" a chapter on "The End of the Clerical Church?".¹

This approach of critically evaluating revelations and theologies may seem at first sight a weakening and dilution of the Christian faith. This need not be so. What is desired is not the diminishing of faith in Jesus but a purifying and deepening of it in the contemporary context of a one world situation and of religio-cultural pluralistic societies. Such a critical dialogue can help critically evaluate what is not certain in theological claims of revelation and give more attention to what is the core message of the faith in God communicated by Jesus.

To a certain extent present day Christians can think of Western European theology and interpretations of the revelation coming down to us through the Middle Ages as something that also needs purification of its socio-political and cultural limitations.

Re-Evangelization of the (affluent) Europeans

Given the injustice of the gravely unjust world order that has been built up during the past five centuries mainly by Christians with the acquiescence of the Church, it would seem that the priority of the mission of the Church should be in the coming decades a return to the simple teachings of Jesus. This will require changes in the preaching and teaching of the Church beginning with seminary and religious formation and university education. The liturgy and Catechesis would urge reparation to the victims by

1 Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1979.

the rich exploiters and not be Jesus dying on the cross to make amends to God the Father. The mission of the Church would have to be primarily the re-evangelization of the rich, the affluent West most of whom are at least nominally Christian. This will lead to the improvement in the condition of the poor in the rest of the world. This will be a great challenge to the leadership of the whole Church. They will have to show the way to salvation by genuinely accepting the humble position of serving others as Jesus did.

The Church would have to articulate a teaching for a new world order based on social justice. This will require concerted action with other religious groups and peoples movements for the common good of humanity. The United Nations Organization would have to be reformed to be truly an agency of a just reordering of the world system providing for a decent livelihood for all and due control of the world's multinational corporations. A new wave of peoples planned migration must make the land without people available to the people without land as Pope Pius XII is supposed to have said in the aftermath of World War II when Europeans, especially Italians, were looking for land for them to migrate to. The Church would have to promote fair trade, care of the environment and control over armaments production and sale, including nuclear arms.

Such a purification of Christianity will be a blessing to the whole world and a grace for Christians. May Pope Benedict XVI have the light and the grace to hear the message of Jesus for our times. This essay is a summary that needs clarification and correction where necessary.