

COMPANION TO THE ENCYCLICAL OF POPE BENEDICT XVI ON “GOD IS LOVE”

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Pope Benedict XVI’s much anticipated first Encyclical has been welcomed as evidence of a more congenial personality, of a less severe figure than his tenure as supervising Cardinal of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had suggested. The Encyclical consists of two parts:

- I) “the unity of love in creation and in salvation history” (nos 2–18)
- II) “Caritas the Practice of Love by the Church as a “Community of Love” (nos 19–42).

It is articulate, well reasoned, reflective, erudite. Its language, personal in style, conveys a sensibility firmly rooted in the Western intellectual tradition: philosophy, Biblical studies, and the classics are amply and dexterously referenced. And its message is highly appealing: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

The reception to the Encyclical has been largely positive (especially considering that the Pope refrains from pontificating here on the divisive issues of sexual morality). He displays a personal understanding of the value and meaning of love in all its multifarious, interconnected complexity, as *eros*, *philia* and *agape*: of love as physical and sexual expression, of love as friendship, and as other-centered in care and service of the other. He links all these to God’s love for individuals and humanity, revealed and expressed in Christ. In a spirit of compromise and understanding, he has apparently endeavored to reconcile mutually opposed positions.

Part I has been applauded by those concerned with issues of inter-personal morality. Here the Pope stresses that the excesses of modern life have to be purified and ennobled by Christian and rational values. Part II is very much centered on love as social charity.

While acknowledging a variety of viewpoints, the Encyclical remains firmly grounded in a traditional Western context. Adherents among the many strains of contemporary Christian theology may thus find much to take issue with here. Feminist theologians will object to its occasionally sexist language, along with its arguments with respect to reproductive rights. Liberation theology in the Latin American grain receives no acknowledgment of its unique contribution to the development of Christian teaching over the past several decades (e.g, love as it relates to compassionate activism and efforts at constructive social change). Proponents of liberation theology in its Asian and African incarnations will have much to say about their experience of the “Christian love” imposed on them through Western colonialism. Those seeking inter-religious dialogue may wish to remind the Pope that the traditional Christian interpretation of “God is love” seems not to have applied to them throughout much of Catholicism’s history. And those concerned with inter-racial justice, global ethics, and ecology may also find fault with Christian theology and spirituality as they experienced it.

Love and Sexual Ethics

Love as *eros* and *agape* are said to be part of God’s plan for human relationships. In modern times the Church has confronted many issues relating to family life and sexual morality. Among the most hotly contested of these is the regulation of procreation. The pivotal moment in this debate came with the July 1968 condemnation of contraception by Pope Paul VI. The Pope arrived at his position independently, whereas his predecessor Pope John XXIII had assigned a special commission to advise him. Pope Paul’s argument was that natural law dictated a necessary link between the marital act and procreation. Observance of the natural law was necessary for salvation. The Pope claimed the power of interpreting the natural law as willed by God (no.4).

“the Churches Magisterium is competent to interpret the natural law.”

“This kind of question requires from the teaching authority of the Church a new and deeper reflection on the principles of the moral teaching on marriage—a teaching which is based on the natural law as illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation.

No member of the faithful could possibly deny that the Church is competent in her Magisterium to interpret the natural moral law. It is in fact indisputable, as

Our predecessors have many times declared, that Jesus Christ, when He communicated His divine power to Peter and the other Apostles and sent them to teach all nations His commandments, constituted them as the authentic guardians and interpreters of the whole moral law, not only, that is, of the law of the Gospel but also of the natural law. For the natural law, too, declares the will of God, and its faithful observance is necessary for men's eternal salvation." (Humanae Vitae no.40)

Paul VI's claim goes far beyond Jesus' New Testament teachings. How can the Church claim to be the authentic interpreter of natural law, which is itself not clearly known to humanity, even to its scholars? Much less that the observance of the natural law is necessary for men's [sic] eternal salvation? In this decision and instruction the Pope presents a theological judgment based on an unresolved philosophical argument regarding the object of sexuality and the marital act. He holds that the primary object of sexuality is procreation, and that therefore the possibility of conception should never be artificially pre-empted in the sexual act. That nature provides for infertile periods is God's Providence, but it is argued that human reason and free will have no right to interfere with the natural and normal consequences of sexual relations.

Even at the time, Paul VI's decision was considered controversial among members of the Catholic hierarchy. The conscientiously faithful were divided in their loyalty to the Church. Throughout the world, many Catholic families disregarded the Pope's instructions. Doubts emerged regarding the wisdom—even the prerogative—of the Church hierarchy to render judgments on such issues. Almost everywhere, average family size decreased; Catholic families by and large followed this trend.

The combination of the Church's teachings and its practices with respect to moral issues, including the denial of the Eucharist to the divorced and remarried, increasingly led Catholics to consider the Church's position burdensome and unacceptable. It became possible to question whether humanity's collective wisdom might not serve as a better indicator of natural law than the theoretical determinations of the Church hierarchy.

The past forty years has witnessed widespread alienation among Christians from the Catholic Church. Participation in the sacraments has decreased. The numbers electing to join the clergy as a vocation has drastically decreased. Seminaries and churches are shutting their doors forever, primarily in Western countries. The Catholic Church's teachings concerning artificial birth control

(and divorce) is one of the main reasons for the laity's abandonment of the sacraments, from Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist to Church marriage. It may be said that the ongoing de-churching of Christians coincides with the period after 1968. Many Asian families who cannot or do not observe the papal instructions concerning the use of contraceptives also tend to abstain from Penance and the Eucharist. The Church has become so conscious of this situation that confessors are advised not to press the issue with penitents, even if they intend to continue the practice of artificial birth control in the future. Many couples in the West and elsewhere simply ignore this papal teaching. Recently Cardinal Martini, who was a candidate for the Papacy at the April 2005 Conclave, requested that this particular doctrine be re-visited.

Benedict XVI indicates in his first Encyclical a greater sensitivity towards the question of human sexuality, ranging from love as self-centered *eros*, to love as other-centered *agape*, with God as the ultimate source of both. Given that the vast majority of humanity, including Catholics and many within the Church hierarchy, no longer support the Church's doctrine concerning birth control, it's not surprising that he would seek to re-examine Catholic Church's position on the use of artificial contraceptives. The situation is rendered even more important as many within the laity exposed to the risk of HIV/AIDS find themselves confronted with a difficult moral dilemma. Perhaps the Pope may appoint a competent commission to advise him in this regard. Some re-thinking already appears to be underway; the Vatican recently granted married couples permission to use condoms when one of them has AIDS.

Having opened an understanding window onto the world of human sexuality, the Pope might consider further attempts to heal a doctrinal wound that has been largely responsible for the exodus from the Church of so many of good will. It would be worthwhile for the Church leadership to reflect upon how often it has been obliged to learn lessons from the experience of common humanity—in the case of slavery, evolution, democracy, the rights of the working class, women's rights, and inter-religious relations. The Church can reasonably request strict adherence in matters clearly related to divine revelation. But for positions based on reason and natural law, it can hardly demand mandatory acceptance among the faithful. The Church's position on questions individuals may have to resolve for themselves deserve at least some reconsideration—for example, the remarriage of the divorced, and their participation in the Eucharist. These are issues that divide members of the Church hierarchy and the laity alike.

In this regard, it would reflect a measure of pastoral prudence to re-examine some of these teachings and practices—many of which have already been challenged by the laity’s increasing awareness of human freedom, for instance, or women’s rights—while continuing to emphasize the need to limit the excesses of human selfishness the Pope refers to in the Encyclical.

“God is love” in a Religiously Pluralist World

The Church is presented as the manifestation of the love of God through Jesus Christ. It develops the theme of the link of human love in its different dimensions to the love of God. What is unduly selfish in human love has to be purified in order to be the other-centered love taught and manifested by Jesus Christ.

A question arises as to why the Catholic Church, with its numerous saints of charity mentioned in the Encyclical, has throughout most of the 2,000 years of its history taught the exclusion of the majority of humanity from eternal salvation due to Original Sin, until the coming of Jesus Christ as unique and universal saviour of all humankind. In this there is a combination of the *anthropology* of the fall of humanity in Original Sin beginning with the first parents Adam and Eve, and the traditional *soteriology* that salvation is only through Jesus Christ and membership of the Christian Church.

For over 1,500 years, since the time of St. Augustine at the Councils of Carthage in 418 and at Chalcedon in 451, the Catholic Church has claimed to be the unique means of eternal salvation. The Church taught that it was necessary to belong to the Church for a person to be saved. Baptism was said to be the unique means of eternal salvation.

The Encyclical speaks of the love of God for all humankind but does not deal with the contradiction between such a universal love and the implication of the traditional Christian doctrine that most of humanity will be damned—before Jesus Christ and even after him—since they don’t belong to the Church and weren’t baptized. This may not be the Church’s position today, but it had been until the mid-twentieth century, with some room left for the baptism of desire.

Throughout its history, the Christian Church has maintained the doctrine of its exceptionalism and superiority, excluding openness to other faiths as possible paths to the good life on earth and salvation thereafter. Catholics were forbidden to participate in the religious worship of other faiths. These were considered false, superstitious, even the work of the Devil. Christian mission possessed no element of honest, frank, respectful dialogue with other religions. On the contrary, missionary zeal was linked to the Western invaders who thought

they were following the God-given call to denounce false religions. That is how “God is love” was interpreted in relation to non-Christians. The Encyclical is rather simplistic in ignoring the long history of Christian spiritual arrogance. The rest of the world has not forgotten. The Christian God’s preferential love of Israel presents another problematic representation of a God of love that is not intelligible to others. The Encyclical would seem to echo this exclusive love which at the same time is held to be a means of healing others:

“The one God in whom Israel believes, on the other hand loves with a personal love. His love moreover is an elective love: among all the nations he chooses Israel and loves her but he does so precisely with a view to healing the whole human race. God loves, and his love may certainly be called eros, yet it is also totally agape. (no. 9)

Such interpretations may be accepted in a Western Christian milieu and culture, but they fail to communicate that “God is love” to those of other faiths—Muslims, for instance. They reflect a chauvinism in the Christian representation of the divine, divinity being the object of meditation and spiritual reflection in most of world religions. Such doctrines have also led to inter-religious conflict and strife across the centuries, from the Crusades to the militancy of the present-day Christian Right in the United States to the so-called “clash of civilizations.”

In the last four decades since Vatican II (1962-1965), Catholic teaching has evolved to include the possibility of salvation of all human beings even outside the Church. Yet some Church documents still claim for the Catholic Church a privileged path to salvation—as in the Declaration “Dominus Jesus” of 2000. The World Council of Churches is now debating and studying how to reconcile evangelism and mission, with dialogue and inter religious relations. Christian churches are discussing how they can come together in Eucharistic fellowship after centuries of estrangement.

God’s Love and Justice in Salvation History

Traditional Christian Trinitarian theology presents God the Father as sending the Son as a human being on earth to redeem humanity. In this perspective, God the Father is said to provide for the death of his only son Jesus. The love of God

for humanity is such that the Father is prepared to sacrifice his only son by his death on the cross.

“God’s passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice” (D C E. no. 10).

We may ask what kind of father requires his son to die in order to appease his anger. This seems a strange interpretation of the God of love, or of the love within the Trinity. In what sense is Christ a saviour of humanity? Why is the whole of humanity condemned to original sin and accused of offending God—even before the birth of subsequent generations? The story of Adam and Eve, though mythical, is not understood merely as such. It is taken as a foundation of Christian anthropology and of subsequent theology, including soteriology and ecclesiology. The traditional theology of salvation, and the “history of salvation,” is founded on this presumption of original sin. This is different from humans living in an environment of sin, or possessing a tendency towards self-seeking behavior, as opposed to caring for others and for God. How can God’s justice condemn the whole of humanity for the sin of the first parents? Is not the underlying hypothesis of monogenism itself questioned in the face of scientific evidence?

As the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” published by the Vatican in 1992 on the authority of Pope John Paul II states, in number 389, the mystery of Christ and the revelation of original sin are interrelated. This seems to imply that the Incarnation of the Son depended on the sin of the first parents. The reality of the conciliar concept of original sin depends on the questionable origin of the whole human race from one set of first parents, and the propagation of original sin by generation as the Council of Trent maintained. (D 1512, 1513. . .)

The situation becomes even more questionable when this love of God is interpreted as benefiting only Christians—that is, those who belong to the Christian (Catholic) Church. Some world religions—Buddhism and Judaism, for instance—find it difficult to understand how a God of love could condemn some human beings to an eternal hell. It is understandable that such a combination of *mythical anthropology, exclusive soteriology, and dominant ecclesiology* is unacceptable, even now, to 95% of Asians—about half the human race. Does not the God of love and the love of God deserve a better theological presentation to contemporary humanity? Doesn’t this situation demonstrate how much traditional

Christian theology has been (and is) linked to European mythology and the partial interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and even of the New Testament within the subsequent framework of Western power?

In number 7 Benedict XVI implies that Christian love is typically *Agape*:

"In philosophical and theological debate, these distinctions have often been radicalized to the point of establishing a clear antithesis between them: descending oblation love—agape—would be typically Christian, while on the other hand ascending, possessive or covetous love—would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture."

This characterization of love in non-Christian cultures as "ascending, possessive and covetous" seems somewhat improper, if not arrogant, on the part of Christians, not to mention the Pope. Would it not be correct to say that both types of love are present in all cultures and need purification when undesirable? Looking at the way the religions and cultures have behaved in the past 2000 years, it would be difficult to agree that Christian or Western culture has been more generous and other-centered than non-Christian cultures.

While the Pope explains his view of the source of the unselfish love of *agape* he refers to Christ as the source of such love:

"Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow. (cf. Jn 7: 37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God" (cf. Jn 19:34).

This would seem to be a privilege claimed for Christians in view of the earlier statement about non-Christian cultures. Such a position poses an obstacle to inter-religious dialogue that should be respectful of others, humble, and willing to learn from others. Once again, this would be a perspective in which the Christian God appears to favor Christians with the gift of love.

It is not clear how John's reference to the piercing of the heart of Jesus is to an original source of divine, oblation love for all humanity. In any case the interpretation of the Gospel message by the Church throughout most of history has not been as a universal saving, liberating revelation, but as a self interested teaching that makes membership of the Church essential for salvation.

This is so different from the proclamation of Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth:

“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . to set free the oppressed . . .” (Luke 4:18).

The Pope quotes Luke recalling the parables of the rich man and poor Lazarus and of the prodigal son and Matt. 25: 25–46 which can be interpreted in terms of charity as social service, but not the proclamation of the liberative mission of Jesus.

Why hasn’t there been a serious questioning of the presuppositions on which an intolerant Christian practice was developed and defended over the centuries?

How has such a theological interpretation of the Trinity led to a Christianity that is exclusivist and disposed to be intolerant to other faiths? The exclusivist interpretation of salvation led to the intolerance of Christians and even to persecution of others when Christians were in power. Mission was for the conversion of others to the Church. The theology of the day implicitly and even explicitly justified the use of force for conquering peoples and bringing them to the faith, which could be called proselytism.

Much of this may now be bypassed or changed, but the basic presuppositions of original sin have not been given up. They are repeated in the liturgy of Easter.

Since human languages and cultures are different and the human mind has limitations in comprehending or interpreting the divine mystery, there is a likelihood of a multiplicity of interpretations or paths to the Divine. Christianity, teaching monotheism, claimed to know the nature of the Divine and of the actions of God in history. The God of love is interpreted as partial in favoring the people of Israel. The European peoples took advantage of such an interpretation of Christian mission to go out to conquer the rest of the world and build the present unjust world order.

God is Love and God is Just—in Church History

Part II of the Encyclical deals with charity as a responsibility of the Church and a manifestation of Trinitarian love. In this section the Pope emphasizes the need and obligation of the Church for service of the needy rendered in a loving manner. While appreciating this perspective, our comments are meant to draw

attention to the sidestepping of love, fully realized, as a state of being that requires justice for all individuals, locally and globally.

The Pope mentions the social teaching of the Church historically as charity, and in recent times as demanding social justice. He confesses that while

“historically, the issue of the just ordering of the collectivity had taken a new dimension with the industrialization of society in the nineteenth century . . .” “It must be admitted that the Church’s leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just structuring of society needed to be approached in a new way.”

Part II also deals with the speculative theory of the practice, rather than with the actual historical practice of the theory. The God of theology may be the God of generous forgiving love, but is not the God of Christian history generally presented as *de facto* siding with the Christians who were often arrogant and violently dominating of others. Several critical comments can be made on this part of the Encyclical. The Pope’s reflections are posited within the context of modern European history.

The Early Church

The Pope begins this part with a reflection on the Acts of the Apostles, with the well known story of charity in the early Church:

*“Charity as a responsibility of the Church . . . The awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the Church from the beginning.
“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.
(Acts 2:44-5). In these words, St. Luke provides a kind of definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements include fidelity to the ‘teaching of the apostles’, ‘communion’ koinonia, ‘breaking of the bread’ and ‘prayer’. . .”*

The pope comments that even as the church grew its

“essential core remained: within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for dignified life. (no 20).

This is a beautiful story, but the history of the Church is far from bearing witness to the communion, the sharing of prayer, and the impact of prayer. The continuation of the story in the Acts is significant. It related how Barnabas

“sold a field he owned, brought the money, and handed it over to the apostles.”

Ananias and Sapphira

The Acts continues with story of Ananias and Sapphira who sold property and kept part of the money obtained, thereby deceiving the apostles and the Spirit. (Acts 5:1-10) There underwent an instantaneous miraculous punishment of death. This shows that the early Church too had persons and families who lied to the community and did not share as they professed to. It may be asked whether this is a precursor of what was to happen to the Christian profession of charity and communion, of sharing and fidelity to the teaching of the apostles. In modern times it may resemble the proclamation of development aid by wealthy (Christian) countries to developing nations while continuing to economically exploit their poor populations.

Aren't there many Ananiases and Sapphiras today, including transnational entities, that rob the poor of wealth? Are not today's workings of international investment and trade—supported through the neo-liberal capitalistic pressures of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, dominated by a (Christian) US and Europe—worse than the behavior of Ananias and Sapphira, though they may profess to be good believers like the honest Barnabas? Perhaps further reflections of the early Church may induce the Pope to comment on these two stories as prototypes of human weakness even in the community of believers.

The whole story—or tragedy—of the Crusades, slavery, the torture of “witches,” the Inquisition, and colonization seem to be excluded from the narrative. An assumption persists that Christian charity was sufficiently administered during those periods in history, as in the Pope's his reference to

“the monastic and mendicant orders, and later for the various male and female religious institutes all through the history of the Church. The figures of saints such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Guiseppe B. Cotelengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orine, Teresa of Calcutta to name but a few stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will. The saints are the true bearers of light within

history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.” (no.40)

These saints, almost all male celibates, are great personalities with their various forms of charisma. It can however be questioned how far their social charity dealt with issues of social justice, or with issues pertaining to inter-personal relations. I was fortunate to meet Mother Theresa on three occasions, including once at her convent in Calcutta. On another occasion at a Catholic students meeting in India, she was asked why she did not work for a fair distribution of the surplus food stocked in India. She replied that is not my mission, I leave it to others.

It is not possible to realize, through greater levels of charity, a world in which the abundant food available is distributed so that there is no one in need? This would require political decisions. The preaching of the Word, the Eucharist and Christian service must be a part of this task, especially when it is the rich and powerful Christian peoples who cause and benefit from such inequality.

In the early Church itself the apostles also had to face the problem of unequal distribution of resources:

“Some time later, as the number of disciples kept growing, there was a quarrel between the Greek speaking Jews and the native Jews. The Greek-speaking Jews claimed that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of funds. So the twelve apostles called the whole group of believers together. . . .” (Acts 6: 1-6)

The seven helpers were chosen to handle finances. Even in the exercise of charity there were problems of justice to be resolved by recourse to authority and the community.

Love requires that all be cared for and no one is in need of the essentials for the good life. To realize this in a situation of great inequality at the local and global levels, what is required is a coordinated strategic struggle against a system of inequality often based on long-term kleptocracy and injustice. The present world order is based on perennial exploitation by powers that claim to be Christian with allegiance to the mission and history of salvation.

Church and State

“The just ordering of society and of the State is a central responsibility of politics. As Augustine once said, a State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves. Remota itaque justitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?” (no.28 a)

It may be asked: did not Christians co-exist with and even legitimize the enormously unjust regimes that have existed throughout many centuries of colonial rule by European powers? From the point of view of the colonized peoples, were these not considered little more than plunderers?

“Fundamental to Christianity is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (Mt.22:21), in other words the distinction between Church and State, or as the Second Vatican Council puts it, the autonomy of the temporal sphere . . . The two spheres are distinct, yet always interrelated.” (no.28 a)

This reply of Jesus to the lawyers who wanted to trap him concerning payment of tax to the Roman rulers did not mean separation of Church and State. His response to the crafty questioners seems to be: since you accept the Roman rule you pay the tax to them. This is not to say that the State is not under God, or not amenable to action by the civil society or the religious groups. There is no teaching by Jesus concerning the Church in this context, or elsewhere. In Christian thinking both the Church and the State are under God.

Why was Jesus Killed?

It would be a useful exercise to ask *what were the real causes of Jesus' death? Did he choose to die?* Did he die in obedience to the Father—as a sacrificial lamb? Or was he killed by a combination of the high priests, Pharisees, and the representatives of the Roman imperial power? Was he not killed as a presumed traitor to Rome, an proponent of the official interpretation of religion as a burden on the mass of the poor afflicted people? The Gospels seem to bear witness to such a view. Cf. Matt. 23: 13-27 “teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites . . .”

Jesus was killed because he was accused of being a threat to the Roman Empire. “Above his head they put the written notice of the accusation against

him: “This is Jesus, king of the Jews.” (Matt. 27: 37). Mark says “He (Pilate) knew very well that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous” (Mark 15: 10). “If you set him free, that means you are not the emperor’s friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the Emperor.” (Jn 19:12). The Gospels reveal that Jesus himself was caught up in issues of justice and politics, and the high priests used these to accuse him in front of Pilate. His ministry was much more than one of mere social activity. His witness to the God of love included teachings and actions that lead to his crucifixion.

Jesus died not because of the justice of God, but because of the injustice of the dominant political regime and of the high priests of the time.

The Pope writes of the distinction between the roles of Church and State:

“A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.”
(no 28: a)

Papal States

The Encyclical speaks of the Church, especially the clergy, remaining uninvolved in the affairs of the State, especially in ideological struggles. The Encyclical seems to pass over the thousand years—until the mid 19th century (1870)—during which the Popes ruled over papal states covering much of Italy, commanding armies and engaging in wars for political power. It was with reluctance that Pope Pius IX acquiesced to the freedom and independence of Italy in 1870. He became a self-proclaimed “prisoner in the Vatican.” The Popes continued this protest from 1870 until 1929, when the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini acknowledged the Vatican as an independent sovereign state. Interestingly, the Vatican is about the smallest state in the world. Papal envoys or ambassadors are members of the political diplomatic corps in many nations.

In other words, at the same time that the Church preached that God is love and exercised a mission and ministry of social service and charitable love of the neighbor, it not only tolerated unjust societies, but benefited from their actions, colonialism being but one example among many.

Justice in the World

The Encyclical does not give the ministry of justice the essential role it should have in the mission of the Church. The 1971 Synod of Bishops presents justice as an essential constituent of the mission of the Church:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

Unless combated and overcome by social and political action, the influence of the new industrial and technological order favors the concentration of wealth, power and decision-making in the hands of a small public or private controlling group. Economic injustice and lack of social participation keep people from attaining their basic human and civil rights.

30. In the Old Testament God reveals himself to us as the liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor, demanding from people faith in him and justice towards one's neighbor. It is only in the observance of the duties of justice that God is truly recognized as the liberator of the oppressed.

34. According to the Christian message, therefore, our relationship to our neighbor is bound up with our relationship to God; our response to the love of God, saving us through Christ, is shown to be effective in his love and service of people. Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every person is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a sibling of Christ, the Christian finds in every person God himself and God's absolute demand for justice and love.

36. The Church has received from Christ the mission of preaching the Gospel message, which contains a call to people to turn away from sin

to the love of the Father, universal kinship and a consequent demand for justice in the world. This is the reason why the Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of people and their very salvation demand it.

(Synod of Bishops 1971: *Justice in the World*)

What is even more questionable in the history of the Church is whether Christians and the Church have manifested *de facto* other-centered oblation. Is the evidence of history not the contrary? While saintly Christians and missionaries administered charitable service, the Church itself has been structurally allied to dominant, exploiting regimes, invaders, colonial rulers, and the affluent. Pope John Paul II apologized over 99 times for such abuses.

Benedict XVI refers to documents of Catholic Social teaching, from the 1891 *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII to the *Centesimus Annus* of 1991. One of their deficiencies is the lack of structural analysis of global social justice. They were all written mainly from a Eurocentric worldview. There has been no critical moral evaluation of European colonialism by the Central Church authority throughout the more than five centuries since 1492. Much less has there been a demand for compensation from the exploiters, who were by and large Christian powers.

The writers of the Encyclicals were influenced by the dominant ideology and ambient culture of their times. The same can be said of the late Pope John Paul II, who wrote disparagingly of Buddhism, and of the present Pope's writings in the Vatican Congregation for the Defense of the Faith (CDF) Document "Dominus Jesus." Both lack(ed) authentic, sustained contact with other religions. They spent most of their lives in a world characterized by (white) racism, whether under Capitalism or Communism. They have had no intimate experience (yet) of peoples dominated by the West. It may be recalled that even Soviet Communism propagated (white) Russian colonial domination over the peoples of East Asia. Both Popes implicitly accept not only the world of neo-liberal domination but a global system of land distribution in which European peoples have seized most habitable land on the planet. (cf. Tissa Balasuriya, *Planetary Theology*, Orbis NY 1984, chapter 2, "The World System").

Structural Lovelessness

The Encyclical does not refer to *the structured lovelessness* that has prevailed in the world, especially since 1492. The emphasis on charity and social work does not

lead the Pope to an analysis of the social structures that regulate the social order. It is such structures—the distribution of wealth and incomes, to take one example—that prevent so many from having their daily bread in a world of plenty and waste. Hence the Encyclical ignores the root causes of poverty and injustice. The opposition to structured injustice in the society of his day led Jesus to clash with the political and social power elites of his time, leading to his eventual death. Unfortunately, the preaching and liturgy of the Church, in emphasizing charity, do not bring these aspects to the fore.

It is legitimate to ask: can Benedict XVI claim that the Catholic Church witnesses to the God of genuine authentic love when historically the Church by and large has not been on the side of reforming and transforming social action for justice, except indirectly by her education and other social service activities? The Encyclical's claims in favor of the Church's social action are hardly credible in our Asian society, where there has been a great deal of critical academic and social evaluation of the Church's role over the past five centuries.

On the contrary—have not the other religions been at the receiving end of Christian degradation, even violence? This was linked to the Church's traditional interpretation of God's love as benefiting Christians exclusively. While well-versed in Western classical literature, along with European philosophy and biblical exegesis, the authors of the Encyclical do not seem to enjoy a close and respectful acquaintance with culture, religious perspectives, and perennial quest for the divine among other peoples. It may be asked whether the Encyclical takes adequate note of the thinking of feminist scholars, activists, and movements in relation to issues raised in Parts I and II. This is a predictable and significant *lacuna* in the teaching of hierarchical church that is male-dominated.

The Encyclical distinguishes functions in the Church and finds a way to separate the hierarchy from the laity. The charitable service performed by the Church is organized as an essential activity, whereas action for justice is said to belong to the political field, to be undertaken by the laity. The Church (clergy) is given the responsibility of promoting a rational approach to issues of justice, but not, it would seem, of participating in its practical administration. It is understandable that the clergy of the Church should not be involved in the running of the state. But the Church should not be identified with the clergy; the laity is also the Church, and will play an even larger role as the clergy continue to decline both in age and population. Yet the clergy still exercise a controlling

influence over Church life. Exempting them from participation in political action often results a lack of effective leadership among the laity at critical moments in a country's evolution. Through active political engagement, bishops in places like the Philippines and various countries of Africa and Latin America contributed courageously to the removal of oppressive dictatorial regimes.

In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, when the priest and the Levite see a man robbed, stripped, beaten, and left half dead on the road, they walk on the other side. Evidently they lack love of the neighbor. This could be a message to the Christian clergy today, even if those two passing by are not Christian priests. Jesus pinpoints the spirituality involved in the concern for the neighbor fallen among bandits.

Several times the Pope refers to the need for the Church not to be linked to political ideologies.

"Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. It is not a means of changing the world ideologically, and it is not at the service of worldly stratagems, but it is a way of making present here and now the love which man always needs." (No. 31 b)

However, whether we like it or not, a certain dominant ideology prevails in social relations and situations. In a time of slavery, the given social order was taken for granted, in fact *de facto* supported since it was not opposed. St. Paul, while wanting slaves to be well treated, at the same time enjoined slaves to be obedient to their masters. "Obey your human masters in all things . . . for Christ is the real Master you serve." Coll: 3: 22-24. Likewise the colonial enterprise was not actively opposed, but accepted and supported by Christians and the Church. An explanation for this could be that the author/s of previous Encyclicals may not have been adequately sensitive to the impact of the prevailing global social order on the oppressed peoples, other than perhaps the working classes of Europe.

Marxism

The Pope refers several times to *Marxism* and explains its position on social service as preventive of social revolution.

"Part of Marxist strategy is the theory of impoverishment: in a situation of

unjust power, it is claimed, anyone who engages in charitable initiatives is actually serving that unjust system, making it appear at least to some extent tolerable. This in turn slows down the potential revolution and thus blocks the struggle for a better world.” (no 31. b)

It is significant that while the Pope criticizes the Marxist theory and system as

“really an inhuman philosophy. People of the present are sacrificed to the Moloch of the future”,

the Encyclical does not criticize the prevailing capitalist system and especially the dominant neo-liberal paradigm directly.

Is not the Pope himself taking an ideological position implicitly in favor of the capitalist system and the colonialism that dominated the world for centuries—and still continues?

Marx, a Jew, was perhaps inspired by the values of the Bible, and his social analysis serve as a reminder to modern Christians of the demands of social justice. But both Marx and the papal Encyclicals overlook the injustices of European colonialism. By asking the Church (clergy) to abstain from ideological struggles, the Pope favors the status quo—mere charitable social action that does little to change an unjust global system. The hierarchical leadership should be encouraged to participate in social movements for justice. It may even be asked whether the Churches have shared in the present day struggle for peace in the world—especially in the face of the blatant violation of human rights in the invasion of Iraq. How different might the situation have been if Christians in US, UK and Australia had been led by their hierarchies to actively oppose this war non-violently. This would require the willingness of the faithful to follow or join a hierarchy that had won their confidence by credible witness on other contemporary issues.

The thinking in Part II of the Encyclical is reminiscent of the strictures on Liberation Theology that emanated from the Congregation for the Defense of the Faith (CDF) when Cardinal Ratzinger was its head. It is noteworthy that the Pope does not acknowledge the mass movements for human liberation and structural change in favor of justice in which the Churches of the world have actively participated in recent decades. Neither does he mention the great champions of social justice, Archbishops Oscar Romero and Helder Camara, whom the whole world honors as friends of the poor and brave

Christian leaders.

The Encyclical emphasizes the service of charity as an essential mission of the Church:

“The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but it is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.” (25 a)

The link between the celebration of the sacraments, ministry, and action for justice is not noted. On the contrary, it speaks of centuries of Christian liturgical celebration, of service of charity and saints in the mission of charity, but passes over centuries of alliance between the Church and Christians and an exploitive social order that included slavery, colonialism, and feudalism. How were the ministries of the word, of liturgy and *diakonia* or charity, exercised over these centuries, and with what impact on the exploited and needy? How was Mt. 25: 31- 44 “I was hungry and you fed me . . . ” implemented by a Church that stressed such views of mission without emphasis on justice? In our part of the world, one is inclined to ask: for whom was the Encyclical written, and by whom? Should not the God of “Deus Caritas Est” necessarily imply that God is also the God of justice? Does not the story of the Good Samaritan imply an imperative to rid ourselves of bandits who waylay defenseless travelers?

Further Dimensions of “God is Love”

The love of God for humanity can be revealed, understood and interpreted in many senses. Common to all Christians is the view that God is love and God’s one commandment is that a person love others as one loves oneself.

Personal and collective service as charity to those in need is emphasized in the second part of the Encyclical “God is Love.” The Encyclical develops this teaching and relevant example of Jesus in his life to persons in all manner of need.

Continuing the analysis of love proposed in this Encyclical, we can refer to love in the gospel of Jesus in several senses:

- i) Love as charity or social service. This is beyond the basic love of

desire termed *eros*, and is other-centered, like the *philia* of friendship and the *agape* of self-giving communion.

ii) Justice that is demanded by love. Justice requires that what is due is given to each one, in distributive and social terms. The Encyclical refers to this in passing and does not address local and global struggles for justice.

iii) Love understood in the Beatitudes as in the Sermon on the Mount. This is a deeper level of self-giving that goes beyond the service of charity and the norms of justice. This is a spirituality that is distinctive in the teaching of Jesus and some of the deeper levels of world religions. It is a spiritual culture and way of life that has the rare power of transforming persons and communities. It is the development of a soul force that does not impose harm on others but tries to overcome evil and anger through love. It bears the burden of interpersonal relations by suffering in oneself rather than by harming others. It is a message of supreme endurance that bears up suffering imposed by others without harming others.

Jesus on the cross bears witness to this message of love unto ultimate self-giving. Unfortunately, the significance of this message has been lost or distorted by the interpretation that Jesus suffered his death to pay for the sins of humanity in order to appease an offended God the Father.

The Sermon on the Mount

A significant omission in the Encyclical in relation to the teachings and life of Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount—as in Mt. 5:1-12 and Luke 6:20-41.

The Beatitudes present a dimension of Jesus Christ that goes beyond the charity of social service and the mere legality or correctness of loving one's friends, and the strict obligations of justice. Jesus teaches that human happiness and the coming of the Kingdom of God lies in the goodness of self-giving for others. From this disposition many conclusions can be drawn for personal and social life.

The teaching of Jesus and of the world religions is summarized in the golden rule “do unto others as you would that they do unto you.” (Luke 6:31) Jesus says:

“the measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.”

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you. If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too, if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. (Luke 6: 27-30).

“Happy are those who are humble;
They will receive what God has promised.” Matt. 5: 5

Have Christians as a community been humble? What has been the relationship of the Church towards other faiths, people of other religions and of non-Western cultures? Has it been one of humility and respect? Could the Church say that it has followed the teaching of Jesus:

“If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.” Mark 10:45

On the other hand has not the historical record of the Church been one of thinking of itself as having the unique truth concerning God and a monopoly of the path and means to salvation. Others faiths and religions were considered wrong, and therefore without rights. They were not only be opposed but defeated and if possible exterminated as works of the Devil. The interpretation of Christian revelation combined with political and military power endowed Europeans with the belief that they were superior human beings, specially loved and privileged by God.

The attitude of the Catholic clergy towards women is that men were/are considered more in the image of the Man-God Jesus Christ and therefore superior to women. Women are still not considered worthy of priestly ordination, or of the exercise of higher teaching and administrative functions in the Church. The exclusion of women in some places from university and seminary theological studies till Vatican II (1962-65) ensured that women’s views had little chance of influencing the teaching and life of the Church. This is a long history of male domination that continues today.

The Sermon on the Mount teaches

“if you lend only to those from you hope to get it back, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. No, Love your enemies and do good to them. Lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High God.

For he is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

Forgive others and God will forgive you.” (Luke 6: 34-37).

His prayer includes “forgive us our sins as we forgive others.”

The world system is very far from the reign of God promised by Jesus. The norms in today’s world system could hardly be more divergent from His ideals. The foreign debt of poor countries constitutes a crushing burden that further impoverishes countries long exploited by their former colonial rulers. The IMF and the World Bank impose structural adjustment policies that compel impoverished debtor nations to open their economies to foreign subsidized imports. Those imports in turn destroy local production. Debtor nations are further required their to privatize utilities and infrastructure—water supplies, fuel delivery systems, health, education, communications and transportation.

Mary’s Magnificat

The Encyclical ends with a reflection on and prayer to Mary the mother of Jesus. She is presented as a model of social service. Her humility and kind services at Cana are emphasized. But no connection is drawn between the virtues of Mary and the active public life of Jesus. Jesus took strong positions concerning true spirituality in religion and sternly castigated religious leaders who placed unnecessary burdens on the simple people. The whole of Matt.23 is a powerful public criticism bound to get Jesus into grave trouble with them.

“They tie on the people’s back loads that are hard and heavy to carry, yet they aren’t willing to lift a finger to help them carry those loads. They do everything so that people may see them.” (Matt 23: 4-5).

Mary knew that Jesus was being targeted by the high priests, scribes and Pharisees. She was with him in his mission unto the death on the cross, and thereafter with the early Church.

The Pope comments on the Magnificat, the hymn attributed to Mary when she visited Elizabeth her cousin. The Pope praises her humble sentiments and the glory of God, but makes no mention of its important yet radical social message.

He does not comment on the revolutionary consequences that would follow from a serious meditation on the socially demanding pronouncements of the “Magnificat.”

“He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans.

He has brought down the mighty kings from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly,

He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich with empty hands, (Luke 1: 51-53)

These radical teachings are in line with the more revolutionary messages of the prophets of the Old Testament, which are also bypassed in this Encyclical.

Our Self-Examination

“Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but pay no attention to the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘please, brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ yet cannot even see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Luke 6:41-42)

On reflecting on the history of Christianity, there is much cause to regret that as a faith community Christians have thought of themselves as superior to others, since they claimed to be the privileged of God. Christians, when in power, were intolerant of others. Among different Christian groups there were religious-based wars that determined the fate of Catholicism and Protestantism in Europe on the basis of political power, under the axiom “*cujus regio ejus religio*” (whose is the regime, his is the religion).

The long centuries of Christian intolerance require an examination of conscience by Christians to see where and in what way the Church went wrong. In the past (prior to Vatican II) the Catholic Church was not accustomed to accepting that it could be wrong in condemning and persecuting others. There has been a significant change in those attitudes since Pope John XXIII, who convoked the Council Vatican II to update the Church (*aggiornamento*), and Paul VI, who somewhat hesitantly continued the conciliar process.

Pope John Paul II's Apologies

The Polish Pope John Paul II was quite clear in apologizing throughout his long pontificate for the wrongs and mistakes of the Catholic Church during his numerous travels. He asked pardon for the wrongs of anti-Semitism; slavery; the Crusades; the Inquisition; other divisions among the Churches; and the wars of religions. He asked pardon from Islam; Hus; Luther; Calvin; Zwingli; Galileo; and the native peoples of the Americas. He requested absolution for the compromises with dictatorships and different forms of injustice; for the mistakes in the perennial confrontation of science by the faith; for the responsibility of the men of the Church for the discrimination against women; for the forced conversions that accompanied the brutal conquest of the peoples of other continents; and for not resisting the temptation of “integrist,” or claims of exclusive righteousness. Pope John Paul II asked for pardon courageously and persistently, often alone in his position.

As the last millennium came to a close he persistently called the Church to an examination of conscience concerning the previous centuries in order to begin a new stage in the history of Christianity with the grace of the millennium 2000. He called it the “purification of memory,” as opposed to the tendency to forget or overlook the past mistakes and wrongs of the Church, which claimed papal infallibility. Thus the aging pilgrim Pope helped open the path to dialogue among the religions, among Christians, among conflicting peoples and generations, as in the inter-religious days of prayer at Assisi, and the World Days of Youth, attended by millions. He asked the journalist Jas Gawronski, “at the end of the second millennium: where are we? Where has Christ led us, or where have we deviated from the Gospel?” (cf. Luigi Accattoli: *Quand le Pape Demande Pardon*, Albin Michael, Paris 1997, p. 18 *et alibi*)

Peace and Non-Violence

“Blessed are the peace-makers, God will call them his children.”
(Mt. 5: 9)

This has great relevance in the history of the Church and now in the 21st Century. It includes options for peace as well as methodologies of action for peace such as active non-violence, and civil disobedience.

Mahatma Gandhi was drawn towards Jesus due to the deep humanity of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon reveals Jesus as giving a divine message

beyond the limited considerations of charity and justice. From Jesus' teaching on love of enemies and forgiveness of those who offended him, Mahatma Gandhi developed the philosophy, theory, and practice of *satyagraha*—non-violent resistance against oppression in all spheres of life. These included the political struggle for the liberation of India from British Imperial rule, and of people of color from white racist domination in South Africa at the beginning of the 20th Century.

The Mahatma (Great Soul) was inspired in his theory and practice of non-violence by meditation on the Sermon on the Mount, particularly against the backdrop of the Indian peoples' struggle for liberation from the largest empire of the 19th and early 20th century. He developed the methodology of active non-violence as a powerful weapon among the peaceful to influence the most powerful regimes and ruling classes. He promoted peoples' power—soul force and the strategy of civil disobedience in which leaders court imprisonment rather than take to violence. In a period when many resorted to violence and terrorism to achieve their objectives, Gandhi pioneered the teaching and practice of civil disobedience.

He trained the poor Indian masses to be disciplined in eschewing violence. He did so by public education, calling off a campaign of non-violence when some groups of his followers resorted to violence. His moral courage and spiritual influence on the masses were so great that it became impossible for the British to continue their rule in India while Gandhi and the Congress leadership languished in British-run jails. He led by being in the front ranks of the resistance—being the first to go to prison on August 9th, 1942 in support of the Congressional resolution demanding the British to “Quit India.”

He was followed by Martin Luther King in the struggle of African Americans for their rights in the US in the 1950s and 1960s. King was a Baptist minister who mobilized the people of good will in the US to protest non-violently against racial discrimination. He was a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and a teacher of active non-violence in the field—until his assassination in 1968.

Nelson Mandela of South Africa, also influenced by Gandhi and King, showed the world a magnificent example of forgiveness at the point of victory. He called on the people of Africa to forget past grievances and live together in peace as South Africans of all races—after having been held for 28 years in an apartheid prison.

Although there were Christians who offered themselves as ransom for prisoners, it would seem that it is Mahatma Gandhi who first brought out this

dimension of spirituality as soul force in the public and political sphere. It is a hope and belief in the ultimate triumph of love that inspires peace and non-violence, as self-sacrificial love can teach a lesson to the offending parties and powers. It is not to be a position of mere passive acceptance of injustice, but a strong active resistance to evil and injustice, that does not bow the knee before insolent might (as Tagore calls it) but holds the head up high by asserting justice, practicing supreme love even unto death. These inspiring examples of some of the greatest personalities of the world in the 20th century are invoked as meaningful lessons for humanity in the 21st century. They afford principles, methods, and sacrificial fidelity to the God of love and love of one another.

This was, in a sense, the message of the martyrs of the early Church during the period of persecution. It became submerged in theology and spirituality when the Christian Church joined the ruling state powers in persecuting dissenters from proclaimed orthodoxy as after Nicene in 325. Tradition, thought of as a source of divine revelation, perpetuated this omission or distortion from generation to generation until recent decades. It is opportune that the Churches return to the teaching of Jesus. This would be one dimension of the re-evangelization of Christians that is said to be necessary today.

21st Century—Violence and Christianity

The 21st century was born in violence with attacks of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. It is by now seemingly apparent that the invasion of Iraq was not motivated by fear of nuclear attack at the hands of Saddam Hussein, nor by a desire to install democracy. More likely it was a step in the effort of the US and its allies to exercise domination over the Middle East, and to secure its oil riches. This war has now gone on for over three years without an end in sight. There is even the possibility spreading to other countries, including Iran.

One of the greatest challenges for Christians in the 21st century is that it was mainly they who exercised world power with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the end of the Communist Empire in Eastern Europe.

In the Encyclical “Deus Caritas Est,” there is no significant reference to this, the first major war of the 21st century, nor to the worldwide movement for peace. This war has already killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

The superpower world of the 21st century has been built up by force and invasion during the five centuries since 1492 when the Christian Churches were partners with Europe in global conquest. These crimes call for reparation. The

Church has been far from being an effective witness to the God of love during the creation of this unjust, racist world (dis)order. Most of the saints mentioned by the Pope as icons of social charity were far from being champions of the rights of the oppressed, or of the conquered peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Global social justice was hardly their concern during the period when the current exploitive world system was in the process of being established. They were inspired by a theology and spirituality that presented the message of Jesus in a manner that legitimized the Western colonial adventure.

How and why did this happen? How has it been possible that despite innumerable saintly persons in the Church, along with the prayers and virtuous actions of innumerable Catholic adherents across millennia, the basic message of the Beatitudes did not become the way of life of Christianity and the Church? They did not inform the spirituality and moral theology of the teaching Church to become their guiding principles, and the core inspiration of Christian culture and civilization.

Need of Purification

It can be asked how and why the Church went so far astray for nearly 1,500 of its 2000-year history. Was there not a mistaken emphasis in the three major functions of the Church?

- in preaching the Word in an exclusivist and dominant sense, regarding Jesus Christ as the unique and universal saviour of all humanity;
- the celebration of the Eucharist being performed alongside the grave injustices of slavery, feudalism, colonial invasions and present day growing global injustice and inequality;
- the ministry of charity being concerned as social service and not requiring reforming social action from the Church leadership.

We cannot help seeing an inadequacy in this interpretation of God and of the mission of the Church as service of charity. The world injustice of 20% of the population having 80% of the wealth and millions going hungry each day is too well known to require repetition.

Background Thinking

- i) Its anthropology is based on the mythical presupposition of original sin, placing the whole of humanity in sin as offenders against God.
- ii) Human redemption is explained as due to the death of Jesus on the cross, paying the required price to God the Father.
- iii) This gives an understanding of the life of Jesus that does not emphasize the positions he took for justice in the society of his day. This dilutes his message concerning the injustices of the prevailing social order and the faults of the religious and civil leaders.
- iv) This gives an explanation of his death as due to need to make amends to the Father for original sin, rather than his stance against the social-religious injustice and struggle for the liberation of the oppressed of his day.

This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the “stray sheep,” a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting point of this Encyclical Letter: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move. (no. 12)

The Pope speaks of a lost humanity. His definition of divine love “God is love” begins with the hypothesis of a lost humanity to be saved by a divine act of reconciliation.

- (v) Consequently, an other-worldly interpretation is given to spiritual discipleship of Jesus, to the meaning of prayer, and to the understanding of salvation and Christian mission. Christian holiness is understood as leading mainly to charitable activity and not to action for justice and

peace that transforms social structures.

There is no practical application of the demands of God is love for peace with justice in the world of the 21st century. The sacramental life goes alongside the murder of war, an economy of grave exploitation, and the pollution of nature.

'A Eucharist which does not passover into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.' (no. 14)

(vi) The sacrament of baptism afforded automatic redemption of infants. The sacraments of penance and Eucharist were not closely related to the need of justice and peace in society, whereas oppressors, slave-drivers, and colonizers could receive the sacraments without meaningful remorse for their social evils. They could be at peace with the Church with a good conscience, especially if they did charitable works.

(vii) Correspondingly, for a long time there was a downgrading of other faiths, and opposition to friendly inter-religious relations.

(viii) The kingdom of God preached by Jesus is seen as realized in the next world, rather than on this earth—resulting in neglect of the earth's ecological resources, God's gift to all humanity, to be safeguarded for succeeding generations to be shared equitably among all peoples.

If the Church leadership does not undertake a critical social analysis of a given situation, it cannot and will not be able to influence the laity and church organizations to take political action to bring about justice. Without a clear option for justice, especially for the poor, the Church cannot fulfill the responsibility, which the Pope entrusts to it:

"the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically." (no 28: a)

A Mission for the Pope

May we suggest that in a subsequent Encyclical he develops the radical demands of the Christian gospel of Jesus. The Pope can propose effective remedies to this unjust situation in a relevant meditation on the Sermon on the Mount. If the Pope listens to the present cries of humanity expressed in global protests and

peace movements, he will discern the potential that the Church has for bringing the war to a halt. The Christian leadership can inspire active non-violent protests, including civil disobedience, by refusing to pay taxes for war and the armaments industry that supports and profits from it. This would be at least as meaningful as the encouragement to charitable social service within the grossly unjust world order of violence and international lawlessness.

The Pope can lead the Christian churches and peoples to develop methodologies of non-violent protest that are now far more feasible with current modes global telecommunications. If the Pope and the Christian leadership of North America, Europe and Oceania are firmly determined to stand up courageously for a just peace in a coordinated manner, the Iraq war can be brought to an early halt. The price will be the severing of the unholy alliance between the Church and the dominant Western colonizers, an option not effected since the time of Constantine.

Reflecting on the wider implications of the message of Jesus—that God is love—the Christian churches in the world can re-think the core of their teaching in the present world situation of war and grave injustice. The catechesis can highlight the different dimension of the demands of love that can lead to the transformation of persons, relationships and structures. We need to develop our thinking and methodology of peace with justice to be achieved by non-violent methods. The alternative is vast, unimaginable destruction, given the divisions in the world and the accumulated powers of self-destruction available to many.

In a subsequent Encyclical or instruction the Pope can give the leadership that the world needs. The world religions have the common core message of peace and strategies to save humanity from impending tragedy to humans and nature. Throughout the world there are numerous people, groups, and movements that yearn for peace and justice, beyond the limits of the dominant neo-liberal capitalism. The gospel of Jesus gives inspiration for another possible world that can give a better chance for most humans to live a full and meaningful life. The World Social Forum meeting in Porto Allegre in Brazil and elsewhere expresses the hopes of humanity for such a peaceful transformation. This present situation is a great challenge for all of us to bear witness to the God of love revealed by Jesus. We hope Pope Benedict XVI will help us all to face this challenge wisely, courageously, and peacefully.

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.” If, as the Pope writes in the introduction the Encyclical is meant to be a guideline indicating his thinking, it needs careful reflection on its intents and limits.

“since I wanted here—at the beginning of my Pontificate—to clarify some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man [sic], together with the intrinsic link between Love and the reality of human love.”

If part II intends only to direct and support the organized Church social action as “Caritas,” then the sidelining here of the mission and action for justice and peace can be understood. We will then await another Encyclical on the justice and peace of God that deals with all issues directly and give the required leadership to the whole church.