

# Visions and Voices from the Margins



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*He is calling for you.*

*Will you follow?*

# Visions and Voices from the Margins: A collection of interviews and essays to serve as a companion to your JustFaith journey.

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We offer a special note of gratitude to Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis for their coordination and support in setting up the interviews captured here. Bill Bickel in Indianapolis, Ind., and Joan Hess in Tell City, Ind., are tireless advocates for families living in poverty. They walk alongside Catholic Charities' clients everyday with guidance, respect, and life-changing assistance. May we all be blessed with their humility, humor, and grace!



# Visions and Voices from the Margins

## Introduction

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“Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up, he is calling you.” He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark 10: 47-52

### **When was the last time your eyes were opened to... something you had overlooked... or someone you had failed to notice?**

We do not see what we do not see, especially those realities or people who have somehow been shunted to the edges of our field of vision. In the pages that follow, we will hear from just such peripheral people—the kind of fringe-dwellers who were central to Jesus, the ones to whom his Good News message was specifically addressed. In the Catholic peace and justice tradition, such people are often described as “marginalized,” meaning they have been pushed to the edge of mainstream society and left to cry out from the sidelines.

“Margo,” the Latin root of marginalized, means edge, brink, or border. While many marginalized people struggle with illness or addiction, poverty or homelessness, it is the sense of isolation or alienation that ultimately leads to despair. Yet, these people on the brink have much to offer and teach the rest of us. It is from these margins that the call for repentance is heard. It is here that hope is born.

Bartimaeus was begging on the roadside when Jesus and his disciples passed by on their way to Jericho. He called out several times before he caught anyone’s attention. It was Jesus who took notice and listened to him. He stopped, turned around, and called out to the blind beggar. He did not presume to act on the beggar’s behalf without first making himself fully available with the question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The Gospel mission, the heart of Catholic faith, calls us to connect with people who have been relegated to the edges of our circles of care. By paying attention to people at the fringes, our eyes and hearts open. When we are drawn into relationships of care and concern, our perspective widens. When we ask, “What do you want us to do?” we are offered new purpose and new direction for our lives. It is along those margins that we encounter Christ reaching out to us.

Throughout the JustFaith journey, you are invited to detour from the mainstream and interrupt your busy schedule in order to pay attention to those who inhabit the margins of our world. The social teachings of our faith challenge us not only to ask and offer help, but also to position our lives with those edgy people, so we might understand what it means to be followers of Jesus today.

As the title of this resource suggests, we have gathered personal testimonies and perspectives from people at the margins. “Visions and Voices from the Margins” is the fruit of a series of interviews with nine people, conducted by JustFaith Ministries’ staff: Their words have been gently edited only for the sake of clarity. To respect the dignity and privacy of those who have graciously shared their testimony, we have not included any photos of **Cindy, Tiffany, Betty, Rosalind, Vincent, Vanita, Monique, Olivia, and Desa.**

To help you understand the context of their responses however, we can share the following:

- The interviews took place in the summer of 2013 in the Indianapolis, Ind., (the state’s capital) and Tell City, Ind. (one of the state’s smallest and poorest towns). Their experiences reflect the realities of living in both rural and urban situations.
- Vincent and Vanita are married to each other; the others are single. Everyone, with the exception of Tiffany, has at least one child.
- All have received assistance and support from Catholic Charities. Rosalind stayed at the Catholic Charities homeless shelter as a child and then returned as an adult with her own children.
- The age range of the interviewees was from early twenties to early fifties.

These individuals courageously shared their personal responses with the understanding that the JustFaith process moves participants beyond stereotypes and assumptions to forge deeper connections within the context of Christian faith. We are presenting their voices in the hope that their personal stories might allow us, in some way, to step into their shoes and see the world from where they stand.

While each testimony is unique, the realities they describe are shared by multitudes across the nation. By reading their testimonies and offering our own responses to the same questions, hopefully we will come to view them, and others we are likely to encounter at social service agencies, as part of our extended human family—as people who are, in every way that really matters, just like us.

Like us, they are mothers, fathers, grandmothers, hard workers, students, and graduates. Like us they experience joys and struggles and sadness. Though they find themselves on the margins, they, like us, do not wish to be labeled as recipients of charity. They, like us, do not wish to be judged by what seems to be lacking in their lives.

## **A Process for Welcoming Voices and Visions from the Margins**

This resource is divided into three chapters, each with its own set of interview questions and responses. You will be reading and responding to these interviews throughout Phase 3. Your personal investment in this three-step reflective process is **critical**.

1. **Before** reading each chapter, take the time to reflect on the interview questions below and write your own responses in the journal space allocated.
2. **After** reading the testimonies, revisit your journal responses. Pay attention to the ways in which your responses were similar or different
3. **Complete** this final question: What connections did you notice to your own story?

# Chapter One: Re-Visioning Community from a Different Perspective

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This chapter invites you to connect with our nine interviewees as they share how they see themselves in our world, and describe what it is like to spend a day in their shoes.

Receive these next few pages as a conversation with someone you have just met. Make the time and space to fully enter this process. As you read through this chapter, highlight one quote that speaks to your heart.

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2. **After** reading the testimonies, revisit your journal responses. Pay attention to the ways in which your responses were similar or different
3. **Complete** this final question: What connections did you notice to your own story?

## Personal Journal

**Before reading, write your responses to ANY of these interview questions:**

- How do you identify yourself?
- What roles do you see yourself in?
- How would you describe yourself?

## Visions and Voices

### *“How do you identify yourself?”*

#### *“What roles are you in and how would you describe yourself?”*

**Cindy:** “How would I describe myself? A person that’s trying to survive in this world. I’m a very hard worker. A mother, a grandmother. Someone that’s been abused and trying to make it in this world. I go out of my way to help people and I feel a lot for the people – I’m just having a hard time, you know. I’m smart, funny.

“I’ve helped lots of people get disability. Now it’s time for me, and I’m having trouble getting it myself. But I’m in the process. I’ve got a lawyer that says I’ll get it. I’m just trying to survive and having a very, very hard time making it.”

**Betty:** “Well, I don’t have a lot of money. I live on a fixed income; I live on disability. I get visitation of two grandsons every two weeks. A lot of people look down on disability; they don’t understand it. It makes it hard to make it month to month.”

### *“When you say, ‘People look down on you,’ how do you experience it?”*

**Betty:** “It hurts, it really hurts. To me, it makes me feel that they think they’re more than what I am. But they’re not, you know, we’re all people, rich or poor. If someone’s got money, I don’t look down on them. I think it’s a blessing.”

### *“How would you describe yourself?”*

**Desa:** “I’m a mom, and I’m a dog owner. I’m sick – I’m not an invalid, but becoming ill’s a major factor that changed my life. I’m a college graduate.”

**Olivia:** “I’m a mom, a friend, a sister, an athlete, a college graduate...yeah, that’s what I think of myself.”

**Monique:** “I guess I just describe myself as a mom. And of course a Christian.”

**Vanita:** “I describe myself as the perfect little angel and mother. I have no negative things towards anyone. I’m always there as a friend. I go to church. I have more kids than what I have at home – I love children.”

**Vincent:** “I’ll describe myself as a black man and a father.”

**Tiffany:** “I grew up hard, but no worse than anybody else I can think of. There are a people that have it worse than me, but there’s a lot of people that have it better than me, too. My mother and my father were never married, didn’t get to meet my dad until I was about seven years old. I never really wanted for anything growing up: I had food, I had the basics, I had everything. I was pretty much spoiled, as far as necessities. When I finally got the opportunity to spend time with my father, he spoiled me because he didn’t have the opportunity to be around.

“I got into my teenage years and something went wrong. At the age of 14, I started drinking, smoking, doing drugs, and everything just kind of spiraled out of control. I barely graduated high school; I had great grades ’til sophomore year when I slacked off. I was going to go to college, but my dumbass got married senior year in high school

and ended up getting pregnant my senior year. I lost the baby a month after graduation. Then I didn't go to college. Everything since then spiraled out of control until about a year ago.

"I started using meth when I was about 20 years old. It got to a point where I didn't want to go a day without using because I was scared of what life would be like without it. I would hold a job for a few months and then get tired of it. I'd quit and try to find something else, or just try to get by. It got to a point in July of last year: I'm the oldest of four siblings, and we had this big family issue where I couldn't come to the rescue like I was used to doing. It hit me so hard that I fell apart – I couldn't work, I used drugs on a daily basis. I kept myself out of it for about a month straight.

*We are not our  
circumstances;  
we may live  
them, but that  
doesn't have to  
define us.*

"Finally, I sat down on my grandmother's porch and truly took a look at myself. I just didn't want to do it anymore. I was so tired. I had lost everything, and I didn't talk to the majority of my family. I lost most of my friends. I picked up the phone and called every rehab facility. Within two days, they had a bed open, and I stayed there for the full time.

"Then I went to a halfway house and stayed there for a month and a half. I guess I was weak, but I couldn't handle staying there – the rules were too much for me in early sobriety, so I left, and I was staying at this cheap motel. I don't know if you know what that's like. My grandmother paid for me to stay at a hotel for a week. I was working and trying to make it across town for the meetings. I took off with my drug use and just went insane, basically. I was criminally insane; it's the best way I know how to put it, because I didn't see anything wrong with what I was doing. When I finally did see something wrong, it was

horrible.

"For the past year of my life, I've slowly been putting everything back together. I have the court system helping me with that – the drug court program here is amazing, you know. They've pushed me to find a job, go to meetings, do better for myself, go to therapy, and pay my bills.

"I've got support, but I still can't make ends meet. I've got so many court fees. I don't even have my own car anymore because mine blew up two months ago. I'm proud just to be able to work a job. I might not wear clean clothes every day, because I can't afford to do laundry. I can't afford to buy food every week, but the fact that I'm making an effort makes me feel good. I'm proud."

***"If someone were to walk in your shoes, what would they see and feel?"***

***"What do you want people to know about your life?"***

**Betty:** "It's a hard way in paying bills and everything. It's hard in my shoes."

**Tiffany:** "I just wish people knew how stressful it was to live paycheck to paycheck, to not have enough gas to get where you need to go. In my shoes, missing a therapy appointment or missing a payment is me looking at 18 months in prison. There's times where I buy gas instead of buying food for the house. Drugs are serious business."



**Rosalind:** “They would feel a lot of pain, failure. Physical, emotional, mental pain. I have some joys if I stay to myself. I have a lot of baggage to carry: a lot of repressed feelings and emotions. If they were walking in my shoes they’d be ready to get out. I’m tired all the time from all the struggles.

**Olivia:** “People look at me when I tell them my story – they just shake their head, like, ‘I cannot believe you went through that, and that you are the way that you are.’ If they were in my shoes, I think it would be like a Twilight Zone. They would look around and say, ‘I want out of this. I don’t know how you do it.’

“I just keep pushing. I keep believing, hoping, and trusting...that keeps me motivated. I think it is hard to walk in someone else’s shoes. When I tell people I’m 52, they say, ‘I don’t know how you do it, someone your age, raising three kids! You have such patience.’ But I just do it. I made a decision a long time ago that my life will be different, and I live my life that way. It doesn’t have to be full of hardship. Even though there’s hardship, I don’t have to live it, I don’t have to own it. I can be in the hardship, but I don’t have to take it on. Yeah, I’ve had those times, but there’s so much more out there in the world.

“I’ve been a lot of places in the world and I’ve seen people suffer. I went over to the Soviet Union when it was an Eastern Bloch country. I saw the babushkas, sweeping the streets with the straw brooms. Then you walk by a building and you hear people screaming, and you know it’s an asylum. I’ve seen a lot and heard a lot, and yet I know I’ve lived a lot. I’ve lived a crazy life. It doesn’t mean I have to act it out and be that. I can give back to someone. We are not our circumstances; we may live them, but that doesn’t have to define us.”

**Desa:** “If they walked in my shoes, I think they’d feel loneliness, failure, disbelief. Yeah, I always seem happy, like everything’s perfect, but it’s never been perfect. I think they’d be shocked.”

**Monique:** “That’s hard for me to answer. I’m sure we all have stories of pain and joy, like Rosalind stated. But I’m a very positive person, very optimistic, so even with all the negative things that have happened in my life, I still have a positive outlook on all of it because God will use it for our good. He uses all that – it may be to help someone. Maybe some of the things that we’ve been through can be used to minister to somebody else who’s going through something similar. We just continue to have faith and overcome it.”

**Vanita:** “She took the words out of my mouth. I try to be nothing but positive. Even if you do have a negative life, you will always give it to Him to let Him take care of the negative that you see. The person who walks in my shoes would be like, ‘Well, it’s hard, but I can make it out’. They would turn their eyes or their thoughts around to be more positive and stronger.”

**Monique:** “Loneliness can be a daily struggle. My relationship with God is great, but sometimes life happens, and life issues, children, everything can get really overwhelming. Sometimes not even a relationship with God can help. Sometimes it’s really hard to even connect because you’re in such an overwhelmed state, or depressed state,

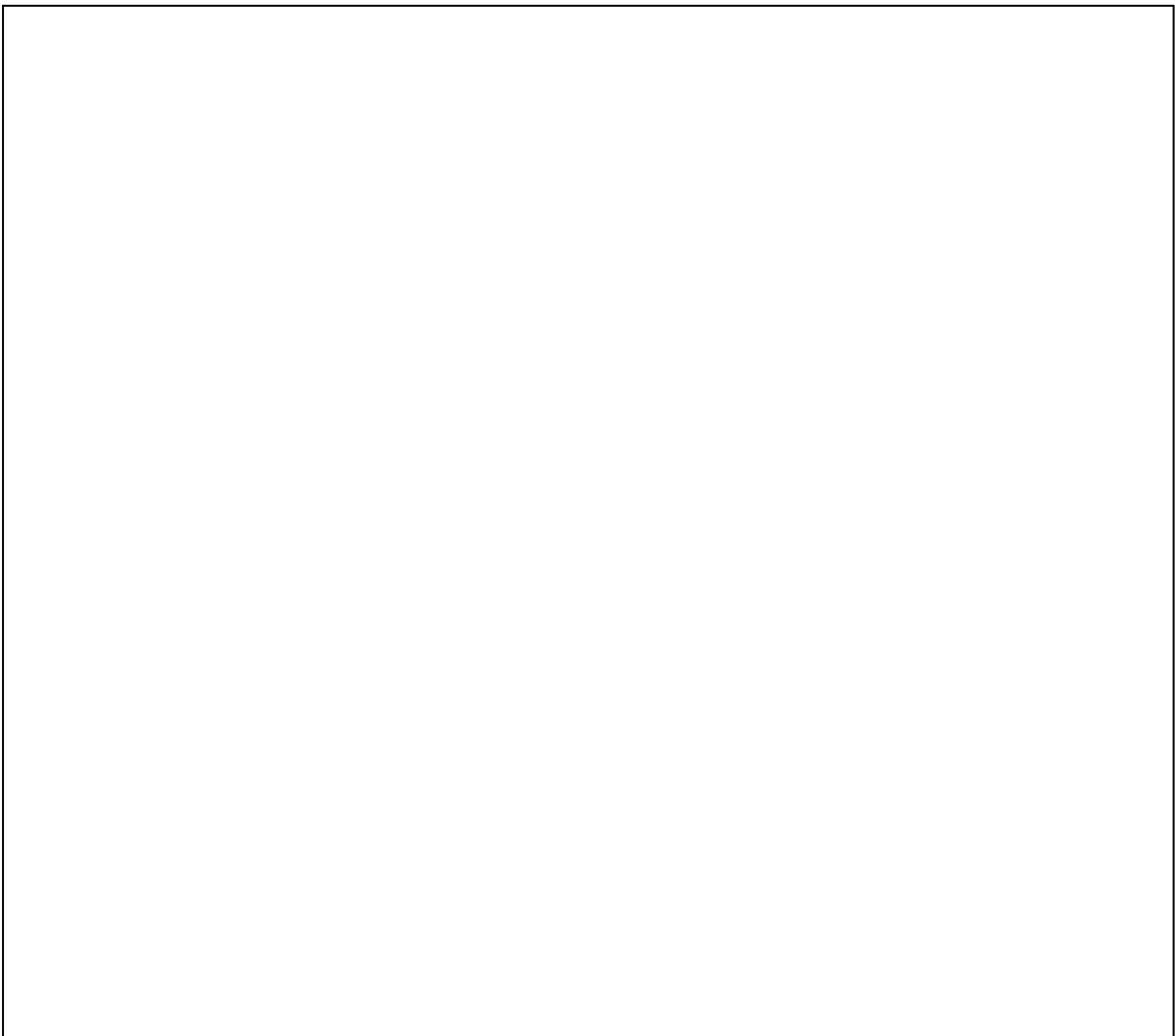
*If they walked  
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never been  
perfect.*

dealing with loneliness, frustrations, paying bills, taking care of your children...I want to make sure they have enough and they never go without, that they have a better life than I had. Of course, we all want our children to have perfect lives, but you have to come to the realization it may not happen. They're going to have their own issues and struggles and things to deal with. What matters is that we're there to be supportive."

*Pause • Offer gratitude for this witness*

## **Return to the Journal**

Revisit your journal and review your own responses. Complete the final question: **What connections did you notice to your own story?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their journal response to the question above.

## Chapter Two: Personal Perspectives on our Humanness

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In this chapter, we reveal the relationships that have brought us comfort, as well as those that have brought us pain. We also discuss situations, organizations, and people that wield power over us, often leaving us feeling defeated or less than human.

Return to the ongoing conversation. Once again make the time and choose the best space to fully enter this process. As you read through this chapter, highlight one quote that speaks to your heart.

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2. **After** reading the testimonies, revisit your journal responses. Pay attention to the ways in which your responses were similar or different
3. **Complete** this final question: What connections did you notice to your own story?

### Personal Journal

**Before reading, write your responses to ANY of these interview questions:**

- What relationships comfort or strengthen you in a significant way?
- When in life have you felt completely powerless?
- Where have you encountered structures or rules that created obstacles rather than helped you?

## Visions and Voices

### *“What have been your closest relationships, where you felt loved and cherished?”*

**Desa:** “I have a best friend I met when I was working at the hospital, in the burn unit, 10 years ago. She was the first real girl friend that was true. I was probably 30 at the time, so that was my first time I met a real, true girl friend that loved me unconditionally. I was able to be completely honest with her. I have my daughter’s father, who I love dearly, but she is still more important than him. There’s just something about her; she’s kind of like a soul mate. She gets me and she loves the real me – I had never had that prior to her. Other than my daughter, I would say that, when I think of that kind of feeling that you’re talking about, it’s her.

“She moved to Hawaii, and her husband wouldn’t let her bring me with them! I don’t have the money to go and see her. We still keep in touch, but it’s different. But she’s it.”

**Vanita:** “I don’t have too much of a friend like that. I never had a female friend like that. I had a male friend: we grew up as friends, real close friends, but he moved on after high school. We had a real bad, big fight, and we didn’t talk no more. It was over something stupid. That was my real friend that I could talk to and laugh with. We went to the movies, not as if it was a date – it was just us doing certain things. He was like a big brother to me, and that’s how I look at it. That was the only one.”

### *“What did these friendships mean to you?”*

**Desa:** “It meant everything to me. It taught me a lot about myself, ‘cause I grew up in an environment where I was told I was nothing; no one will ever love me. It’s different when it’s a guy, like when you have a boyfriend type of love. With her, she loved me for me. There was no strings attached at all, and so it taught me that I could really be myself and someone could still love me. Even with my funny way or sarcasm, she was there for me. Stability wise, it’s meant everything.”

**Vanita:** “It meant a lot. It broke my heart and feelings that he broke off contact, far as being friends and I never had another male friend like that. But it’s like a different feeling, like the best friend is your husband and then you have another best friend that’s been there before the husband, so it was a different feeling.”

### *“What are the closest relationships where you have felt loved and cherished?”*

**Tiffany:** “My grandparents, I was never really close with either of my parents. Dad’s around, for support when I need him but we’ve never really been close. I’m closer with my grandparents. Those memories that normal people have, like dancing on their dad’s shoes, I have those with my grandfather, because dad was never really in the picture. But my grandmother has told me several times she thinks of herself as my mother and that really is true; if it wasn’t for them I probably wouldn’t have made it past 10 years old.

“Like I said, I had a rough childhood. When I was nine years old, my mom basically signed me over to her mom because her husband was beating me on a daily basis. She didn’t want to leave him because they already had another child together. So instead of doing the logical thing, she passed off her oldest child to her mother. I’ve been bounced around from family member to family member; every time, I ended up back with my grandfather and his wife (which is my step-grandmother). Her daughter is like a sister to me. We’re a tight-knit little family; it’s always been that way.”

### ***“What relationships have caused you pain?”***

**Rosalind:** “My second pregnancy was terrible for me because the kid’s dad didn’t want me to keep the baby, and he was always talking about aborting it. He’d say, “I’m not going to be there, and if you don’t get rid of that bundle, you’re going to be on your own.” I was on my own anyway with her [my first daughter], and I didn’t know what I was going to do with the baby.

“But I kept the baby, of course; he’s two. But that was the hardest time: ‘Should I kill my baby?’ I’m just grateful that I did keep my baby. But now his dad’s finding his-self needing us, ’cause he’s incarcerated. He’ll be getting out soon and needs somewhere to go, and the only door that’s open is my door, basically.

“...I want to move forward with it and I want to forgive. I do forgive, but it’s still there. I want to be that good person to my children so that they can know who their daddy is. They know him, but they only know him through pictures or visiting hours...other than that, I don’t know how it’s gonna be. That was my hardest time, just carrying my child knowing that the dad didn’t want him. But I guess he’s realized that he does have children out here. He can’t just say, ‘That’s not mine,’ and think that just takes all the responsibility away – it don’t. I just hope and pray everything will go well.”

**Monique:** “I haven’t really experienced true friendship, what you were talking about earlier, even from my parents. My mother was a loving mom, but we had issues. She was abusive for a while, but she had her own issues; she grew up raising herself. She was a single mom, she was struggling for a long time, so it was hard for her.

“As far as friends, there’s not really anybody I can say has been a really true, genuine friend. I have one I could probably say, but even with her, I think, ‘As soon as you do something...[the friendship is over]’ But we’re all human, and we make mistakes – we’re not always what other people feel we should be. When you tend to do something that upsets someone, or frustrates them, they don’t know how to still be friends. I haven’t experienced a friend who is quick to forgive, or get over it, and still love you.

“...The only way that I’ve been able to find real friendship is through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Nobody can treat me the way He does. No matter what I do, no matter how many mistakes I make, no matter how imperfect I am, I know that He’s gonna be there and still love me and still be merciful and still bless me. That’s the greatest thing.”

*“We’re all human, and we make mistakes—we’re not always what other people feel we should be.”*

***“Have you encountered organizations whose power  
over you directly affects your life?”***

**Vincent:** “There are certain things you have to go for: you have welfare or food stamps, you go to the welfare office, you go to the township, even in shelters. Yes, they help, no doubt they help, but...I don’t want to come off as not being thankful for what they’ve done for me, but at the same time, you don’t want to do it, but you have to...And then, as far as power go, I think it’s more about the people that’s employed in these systems. They think they have a sense of power, and it kind of gets to their head. I think there’s good people in those systems; they’ll try to help you, just like here [Catholic Charities]. But there’s also bad people in there that make you feel small, make you feel little. Then you ask, ‘Why am I here? Why am I dealing with this?’ I don’t want to come off as not being thankful, ’cause I am thankful. But at the same time, sometimes you just go in wanting help – nothing else, just help – and then you got to deal with certain bullshit that people put in the way of that. You deal with that while you’re still trying to maintain your sense of pride. Like I said, there’s people in the shelter, especially here, that helped us, and I’m thankful for them; I’ll never forget them.

“As far as [our] kids go, I don’t ever want them to experience that. I tell them all the time, ‘Keep your grades up, school’s everything.’ I don’t want them to have to go through welfare. They seen it through us, that’s enough.”

**Desa:** “It’s frustrating. It seems like whichever program you go to, whether it’s the shelter or getting assistance, going to the long line, you see so many people abusing it, and not appreciating it. I’m here to use it as a stepping stone, do my time at this shelter to get to the next stop. There’s some people, that’s their life, so they abuse it and they’re not appreciative, not thankful. I’ve done the long line when you go to get your food stamps: sit there all day and the caseworker treats you like crap, won’t even look you in the eye. It’s just so belittling. Then there’s people...who truly abuse the system, and that’s just as frustrating as dealing with the caseworker that thinks you’re beneath her.”

***“Could you share a time when you felt powerless,  
and did not know what to do next?”***

**Olivia:** “It was when I lost my house, before I came [to the Catholic Charities’ homeless shelter]. At the time, I just had my daughter. It was devastating – it was like, ‘What do I do? Where do I go?’ For three months we were without our own place, and I just made the best of it so she didn’t see where we actually were. I never used the word shelter; I said, ‘Oh, that’s our room, that’s where we’re going.’ I think it’s a blessing that I did that. She was 3 years old.”

**Vanita:** “I have five [kids]. I was told by my mother to abort my oldest. But he’s the big blessing I had...and look at him now, he’s doing good. I’ve been the strongest thing that he will ever look at. Everything that we went through, he was right there.

“Our fourth son broke his ankle playing football. All the little kids in the neighborhood just went nuts ’cause he had his ankle going one way, and he was looking the other way, and saying, ‘Oh mommy, mommy.’ I was powerless and couldn’t do anything but hold him. I couldn’t say, ‘It’s going to be OK,’ because I

didn't know what the hospital was going to do. Then he went back to the field and got his chin busted open. I did not know what to do from there...I can rush him to the hospital, but that's all a Mom can do.

"...Everything that we went through, they went through. You have to tell them, 'Try your best to make it through school and do twice as better than me,' even though I did graduate. I want them to make it where they won't have to look back and say, 'OK I'm going through the same thing my Mom and my Dad did.' That would be so hurtful, because I would see my kids in a shelter like we was in a shelter. You don't want to see that; you want them to step up and do a little better. Do twice as better as what we did, 'cause then you'll make it all the way up."

**Desa:** "...When I was 21 years old, I was pregnant with my daughter. Her dad was in a car accident; he lived, but had a massive brain injury. It was just bad. Well, my family had disowned me at 18, 'cause our daughter's biracial, and his family took me in and loved me. But when he had the car accident, something changed. They didn't like me, banned me from the hospital. So I was kind of starting over from scratch, pregnant and beyond alone, and young and stupid. They had me sign for all this paperwork, so I had millions of dollars of medical bills that I got stuck with. He survived, and I rehabbed him and took care of him that whole bit. That was my first lowest point: to be rejected by yet another family.

"Then, I got sick and was going through savings. I realized I was getting ready to lose my home, and...I couldn't fix it, it was going to happen. I had just got a new car, so I told them to come get it. My daughter was old enough that she knew we were coming to a shelter – it was a done deal, she knew. I have lupus and fibromyalgia, so I was in the hospital for a long time, and there is no one but my daughter. I hate to put that on her, but at the same time, she kind of helped. We had to help each other to get through the shelter. That was my second time thinking, 'I can't do this – there's no hope, and it doesn't matter how nice the people at the shelter are.'

"That feeling of failure doesn't go away, you know what I mean? It doesn't matter if they know our story or not, we're still Room 21. You have nothing. All you can think about is, 'How did it happen?' Seems like it happened overnight...I rebuilt from the first time, and obviously I'm in the process again, but when that feeling of losing it all first hits you and you can't fix it, it takes a while. You blame yourself. No matter what put you in that circumstance you blame yourself for it."


**Monique:** "I had another baby. I never felt more powerless than when she passed away of AIDS. I just wanted to rewind time. I wanted to bring her back to life. All these feelings and thoughts were just going through my mind like, 'God, just bring my baby back to me,' you know? There's nothing more that I wanted than to just be able to hold her in my arms again, with her breathing and laughing. When that happened, I just wanted to die.

"I still blame myself. I always think I could have done something different. You know, now they tell us to lay the babies on their backs; she was on her stomach. Maybe I, you know...I don't know. I was sleeping in a separate room from her. Maybe if I was in the same room something would have woke me up...I don't know."

*Pause • Offer gratitude for this witness*

## Return to the Journal

Revisit your journal and review your own responses. Complete the final question: **What connections did you notice to your own story?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their journal response to the question above.



## Chapter Three: Reconsidering Wealth

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In this chapter, we discuss success, accomplishment, joy, and wealth. As you return to this final part of the conversation, again make the time and choose the best space to fully enter the process. As you read through the chapter, highlight one quote that speaks to your heart.

1. **Before** reading each chapter, take the time to reflect on the interview questions below and write your own responses in the journal space allocated.
2. **After** reading the testimonies, revisit your journal responses. Pay attention to the ways in which your responses were similar or different
3. **Complete** this final question: What connections did you notice to your own story?

### Personal Journal

**Before reading, write your responses to ANY of these interview questions:**

- What are your greatest joys and successes in life?
- According to you, what does it mean to be wealthy?
- How would you define what it means to be successful?

## Visions and Voices

### *“What are some of the greatest joys and sources of happiness in your life?”*

**Tiffany:** “Helping other people, even getting just a smile on other people’s face when you help them.”

**Betty:** “My children and my grandchildren are my greatest joy.”

### *“In what ways do you help other people?”*

**Tiffany:** “I give people advice. When you see somebody walking down the street and you know them, ask them if they need a ride. And the best help you can give somebody is just to listen.”

**Cindy:** “Yeah, I used to take care of my best friend in the world. He was disabled. I helped him get his disability payments. When he wasn’t eating, his health got really bad. He’s passed away since, but right before he died I was going to the grocery store for him. I was bathing him and fixing his breakfast. I would clean his house, do his laundry, check his mail for him, and just go over and keep him company. I’d bring him holiday dinner. After taking care of my kids, before I’d sit down for the holiday, I’d bring him over the holiday dinner.

“And then something was telling me to take these other two people a holiday dinner. So I took them over one...and the looks on their face! They just smiled. They wasn’t going to have anything, but I just felt something was telling me, God was telling me to. That’s what I told them, ‘God was telling me to bring it to you, so I did.’ You know, people do good things for me and I look at it as returning the favor. I’m glad to do that. As long as I can, I’ll keep doing that.”

### *“What have been some of your greatest joys and sources of sense of personal satisfaction?”*

**Rosalind:** “I’d say giving birth to my children. I always thought I wasn’t able to have any kids. I was like 28 and I’m number four of six children. I was the last one to give my parents grandkids. I thought I would never be a mother but I’m just grateful to be a mother. That’s my biggest joy in life.”

**Monique:** “That’s very funny you said that, Ros, because I didn’t think I could have children either for a while. So when I first had my son—I can’t explain it. When he looked at me and we had that first connection, eye contact, you can’t describe it.”

**Desa:** “I too, ironically, was told I could never have children. I had miscarried twins and then I got pregnant with my daughter, and it was a very difficult pregnancy. Having her was amazing. I remember, you look down at your baby, and she’s the most amazing thing. I knew that I would her give her the love that I was never given. I knew that it was a big job and I was so happy to be able to do this and change someone else’s life. So that was a big moment for me. And then making it through college, ‘cause I did it all on my own, and my daughter was so proud. She helped me along the way. I it was a very big moment for both of us, so I would think that those would be my two.”

*“My children  
and my  
grandchildren  
are my greatest  
joy.”*

**Vanita:** “Well I can say life, the children, and chocolate.”

**Olivia:** “I think for me, you know, I never had the opportunity and the joy to give birth, but raising my three children has been such a huge joy for me. And knowing my background, how I was raised, I knew that life could be different. I’ve been given the opportunity now to raise these children different than I was raised in a more positive setting, where sky’s the limit for them in opportunities and love. That’s one of the biggest joys for me—to wake up every day, and to go to bed knowing that they’re in the next room knowing I can go and look in on them, just watch them sleep. I call ‘em my three little angels. They’re very precious.

“The other thing is there were eight of us in my family, and I was the first one to go to college and graduate and everything. So, I was really proud about that. I maybe opened the doors for my other siblings and their children to see that’s possible. It’s not just for those who have money or those who always get straight A’s. That was a big joy for me.”

**Vincent:** “I would say just making it through this far. And also seeing our kids grow up and helping them along the way. I think my satisfactions haven’t really came yet—I think they’ll be coming more in the future. I mean, seeing my kids make it, make it out, just be like we made it, you know? And I don’t have to worry about anything like we’ve been going through. I say that’s pretty much it.”

### ***“What does to ‘make it out’ mean for you?”***

**Vincent:** “‘Make it out’ means, you don’t have to worry about the next bill. You don’t have to worry about shutting off that light or any bill; you can live comfortable. You probably have a couple worries, but you don’t have to worry. It’s just you in a comfortable spot, satisfied. Everything’s done the way you want it done; nobody dictates that.”

**Desa:** “Ever since my daughter and I lost our home, we stayed with friends first because I had such a stereotype about coming to a shelter. For me that meant I was a failure. So we stayed with friends and we had stuff packed up here and there. When we lived in the transitional apartment, I never completely unpacked anything. We had just a couch; I did not unpack clothes. We’ve moved and are where we want to be, but I still have not unpacked everything. It’s like I’m afraid to unpack because I don’t feel like it’s completely mine yet. So, I’m working on that too, making sure it becomes my home, that it’s not going to change in six months and we have to be kicked out.”

### ***“What does it mean to be successful?”***

**Tiffany:** “My only hope for the future is if I could just get by. I want a car that doesn’t blow up every 6 months—I don’t want to have to buy a new car every 6 months or go without. I want to be able to make ends meet and not have to worry about where next week’s food’s gonna come from. I don’t want to have to worry about if I am going to be able to feed my dog or have to give him away. I just want to be able to make ends meet smoothly without having to donate plasma, or other things that I’ve had to do. I shouldn’t have to go and give plasma then drive myself home just to make ends meet.”

### ***“What does it feel like to ask for help?”***

**Tiffany:** “At first it’s very degrading; you’re afraid people will look down on you. But I’ve come to realize that I can’t do it by myself and I’m not ashamed of asking for help anymore. Shame is one of the most horrible feelings in the world and I just refuse to feel it. If I’m ashamed of the place where I’m at instead of proud, then I’m going to go back to my old way of life. That ultimately means losing my life—whether I end up OD-ing [overdosing] and killing myself or going to prison for the rest of my life, it’s not worth it.

**Betty:** “Well, it’s embarrassing to know I have to ask for help. I wish I could do it myself. I wish I had money to do it on my own. We’re not bad people; we’re nice people. We try, and we don’t like to ask for the help if we can get by not asking for it.”

### ***“How would you describe what it is to be wealthy?”***

#### ***“What do power and wealth mean to you?”***

**Cindy:** “That’s a tough one. I always think that people with money have power.”

**Olivia:** “I think not to be concerned that, ‘Oh the battery went out in the car. How am I gonna pay the light bill? Am I gonna not put food on the table after I have to get the car running?’ You don’t want to have to be concerned about that. Wealthy can mean two things—when you talk about wealthy in the sense of the people that I have in my life, I feel I’m very wealthy, but when it comes to the world’s terms of what wealth is in the monetary sense, I’m very poor. There’s that imbalance.

“So for me, if I were wealthy in the monetary sense then I feel like if something were to go wrong, the water heater or whatever, I’ve got that reserve and can say, ‘Let’s take care of this.’ Nothing else has to suffer; things can just continue to run. And that’s what I look at as being wealthy. You don’t have to have that concern that if the kids just broke the front glass window, you have to put a board on it until we can fix it.

**Monique:** “Wealth to me is that you have more than you need. You have everything you need and then some and enough to help and give other people. Just money is not an option, it’s not an obstacle. You have it; you don’t have to worry about it, you don’t even think about it.

**Desa:** “Wealth is a bad word for me, I don’t like it. I grew up in a very, very wealthy family, but I was never loved a single day. Somehow by school age I knew my life wasn’t

*“I would rather be rich with love.”*

right. I knew other kids in my classroom seemed loved and I knew I wasn't. I was never physically abused in any way and obviously financially I was taken care of, but there was just something missing. It was faith 'cause I don't know how else to describe it, but I knew God loved me and I knew he was there. So I just kept going. But then when I got kicked out at 18 because of my daughter being biracial and her father being black, I immediately knew that there was a different type of love available. So being with her father, I liked being not wealthy because at least I was loved and cherished. I've always felt like wealth meant judgmental people with money. They can say all they want. They do charities. They help out, but they pick and choose who they want to help.

“Now this is just my insight, I don't know if it's always true, but for me I look for security. I mean if my battery in my car dies does it mean I have to ride the bus for a month? I always want to have a back up. When everything bad happened with me I went through my savings; I went through my 401K. That's when I felt bad: when I no longer had security. So for me security, it does mean being financially stable, but I don't think of it as being wealthy. If I get wealthy I don't want to be like wealthy people—I mean that stereotypical thing. But for me if I'm wealthy, I'm evil, I'm bad, and I don't want that. I would rather be rich with love, but eating ramen noodles.”

**Betty:** “Well a lot of people think being wealthy means having a lot of money and power and stuff to do things with. To me being wealthy is having children. That's my wealth.”

**Tiffany:** “I don't think it has anything to do with money. True power is having pride in what you do have and wealth is just how much love you've got. And it's not the love that other people give you it's the love you have for the world. If I just had enough to make ends meet I'd be happy. I don't want a mansion. I don't want a BMW, all I want is to be average, and to be happy.”

“Even though I'm trying really hard I still can't get any kind of government aid. I can't apply for assistance. I can't get food stamps and I can't get Section 8 because of the drug felony in my past. You know because of a mistake I made almost 3 years ago now—even though I'm clean today and I am a functional member of society—I can't get the help I need. I think there should be [ways to get the help I need]: if you completed treatment, if you can pass a drug test. Six months treatment, and drug tests, even if it's a drug test [only] once a month. I pay over a \$100 for drug tests every month [for weekly tests]. Wish I didn't have to pay for them but, you know, that's due to my own mistakes.

**Rosalind:** “I never really experience wealth. All I know is struggle—I know how to survive a struggle—but all I know is struggle, living it all my life, childhood on up. I'm trying to get to know that wealth, as far as the security. We wasn't wealthy as far as money, but we wasn't even wealthy as far as love much either, because you know in a house that struggles everybody's separated. I really never knew that word, wealth, it never was in my vocabulary, so I don't know what it is, but I'm trying to get to know it.

***“What do you want the volunteers who come here  
to know about you and your family?”***

**Olivia:** “That we are just like them. We’re just only in this situation temporarily. I have always heard it said, and I experienced it, that most people are one paycheck away from losing everything.

“We had a couple times where some of the families who volunteered came out and talked. They sat down and wanted to know our story. I liked that they came out and wanted to know the story, not prying. Sometimes when we were served, the volunteers were like, ‘I’m so sorry.’ Well, I don’t want them to feel sorry for me. I want compassion but I don’t want you to tell me you feel sorry for me, like I’m pitiful. There’s a difference there, but when they came around and talked with you, you could tell when it was genuine, and it kind of makes you feel better. It’s kind of cathartic, to sit and talk to someone and they’re like, ‘Oh yeah, we’ve have hard times too.’

“When you’ve just left the shelter you can’t come and volunteer. But I feel like for people who’ve been there and did come back and help other people, it is good because you can tell them, ‘This is real. We’ve been here. This is how far we’ve come. They helped us get this far.’ I feel like that is more helpful than some millionaire across the street that decides to show up.”

**Tiffany:** “We’re people too. We’re human just like everybody else, we just happen to be down on our luck. There’s no shame in needing help, and there’s no reason to look down on those that need help. I feel like there’s a very big stigma that has to do with the underprivileged and an even bigger stigma with drug addicts. A lot of people don’t think we can ever recover, but I’m walking proof that we can. I just want the stigma to go away. I’m tired of getting looked at like I’m trash because of my past. When I’ve been trying for almost a year now—it’ll be a year next month—just to make ends meet and be a functional member of society. It shouldn’t be this hard. I’ve been turned down from at least two jobs because of my past.”

**Rosalind:** “You would just want them to know, just cause we’re in this situation doesn’t mean that we’re pitiful. We just want them to know we’re human just like they are.”

**Vincent:** “For a volunteer, I would just tell them to come with an open mind. Number one: be real. Number two: come with an open mind. Number three: if someone wants to tell you something, take time out. Even if you have to go do something, take time out and see what their problem is; just listen. It don’t hurt to listen. Sometimes that’s all somebody want you to do is listen. Just be non-judgmental. It’s a shelter; everybody has different situations as to why they in the shelter. That’s the way I would do it if I was a volunteer. I would just come in, no preconceived things or anything like that, just come in and help.

“Another thing, just be prepared for anything, ‘cause you have the good people in here and you have the bad people in here. You know you take the good with the bad so it’s like, ‘Be prepared for anything.’ You might walk out with a new friend, just ‘cause you listened.”

***Pause • Offer gratitude for this witness***

## Return to the Journal

Revisit your journal and review your own responses. Complete the final question: **What connections did you notice to your own story?**

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## In Conclusion

If we wish, we can encounter people like Cindy, Tiffany, Betty, Rosalind, Vincent, Vanita, Monique, Olivia, Desa and their families in our own communities. Perhaps we already know them. Perhaps we are already well known to people at the margins. The conversations and connections we have read here also included laughter, tears and courageous sharing from the heart. When we choose to stop, visit, listen with our hearts, and dare to ask what we might do for each other, we will surely gain new insights about our world and our role in it. This is how healing begins in communities divided. This is how eyes are opened and new perspectives start to shape choices, as relationships grow. This is also how we continue the healing work of Jesus, to become the disciples we are called to be in our own time and place.

We encourage you personally, and in your JustFaith group, to hold the lives, joys, and struggles of Cindy, Tiffany, Betty, Rosalind, Vincent, Vanita, Monique, Olivia, Desa (and so many like them) in the love light of prayer. How will you continue to open your ears, your eyes, and your heart to voices and visions from the margins?

***He is calling for you. • Will you follow?***



# Culturing Peace in a Culture of Violence

By Jack Jezreel

This essay was a keynote presentation given by the president and founder of JustFaith Ministries, Jack Jezreel, to the 2007 annual Pax Christi USA convention. [It has been updated for the JustFaith program in 2013.] We are all called to bring God's loving compassion to this world and to be peacemakers in a world of strife and conflict. This essay offers JustFaith graduates ways to do just that.

## Introduction

The title of this essay, "Culturing Peace in a Culture of Violence," speaks to the daunting reality that we face in this poor, battered, wounded world. It does indeed feel like "a culture of violence," a world of violence. From Syria to Afghanistan, from New Orleans to Los Angeles, from Iraq to Colombia, from the glaciers to the coral reefs, from Haiti to Louisville, Kentucky, there is violence, *and it is not random*. As we dig below the surface of sound bite headlines and apply some kind of careful attention, we realize the violence around us is systemic. It is the logical consequence to choices and actions that set in motion a predictably violent outcome. Violence is like the manufacture of a product. *It is indeed cultured.*

If you want milk to become yogurt, you have to culture it with the right ingredients. If you want violence, you have to culture the world with the right ingredients or, more correctly, the wrong ingredients. We have a culture of violence because we human beings have cultured violence. We have created it. It is not a surprise. It is not random. It is the predictable consequence of a recipe we decided upon and carried out, deliberately or mindlessly. That is both the bad news and the good news. The bad news is that we are responsible. The good news is that we can choose a different recipe. The good news is called the Reign of God. And the reign of God is at hand. It is *at hand*. It is for the picking. It is for the choosing.

My sisters and brothers, it is true that the world is breathtakingly beautiful and wondrous; we have a world in which to delight and of which to awe. However, the daily reminders of poverty and starvation, sectarian violence, environmental degradation, global warming, the looming wars over water, the current violence in the name of oil, the battles over land and food also remind us that we have much to grieve. And grieve we should. The crisis is real.

But the first and last word is a holy word called hope – not hope like optimism that everything will turn out fine; we already know that that is not true. The snuffed-out lives of starving, bombed, or macheted people every day say very clearly that everything in this world does not turn out fine. Rather, the hope I speak of is the hope of our faith that says that there are things worth living for, things that give life – and they are love, reconciliation, compassion, justice, peace, solidarity and healing. The things that bring life and sustain life are love, reconciliation, compassion, justice, peace, solidarity and healing. We see, perhaps with fresh eyes, that *Jesus is the*



*savior of the world*. If we do not heed his message, we will perish. And, if we have indeed crafted a world – perhaps blindly – that is at risk, that is in crisis, hope tells us we can live a different way and there can be healing and there can be a new possibility. It is possible, instead of culturing violence, for us to culture peace.

This essay is offered in the hope that I might say something that will help us all *grow* the work of peace and justice. And let me make clear that my words are written out of faith to a community of faith. These are, first and foremost, words meant for the Church. We need the community of those committed to peace and justice to grow bigger than it is. And if the Catholic peace and justice community is to get larger, it will do so because and only because it has a focused relationship to the place where most Catholics are, and that place is the parish. Most Catholics are in parishes. If you want to see something Catholic grow, the place to look to is the parish. That observation colors everything that follows.

By the title “Culturing Peace,” I mean it to have double meaning. First, borrowing from the biological definition of “culturing,” I want to suggest that we need to identify all of the right ingredients and commit ourselves to the full mix of the right ingredients to allow peace to happen. That is, what range of commitments must we make to see an outcome like peace? And, second, borrowing from the sociological definition of “culturing,” we need to deliberately apply ourselves to what actually makes for culture, human culture, and how to apply the science of that to crafting a *holy* human culture.

For us to “culture peace,” I am first relying on the biological image of culturing, as in culturing yogurt or culturing penicillin. Essentially, what ingredients, what conditions must be present in the mixture for something to grow? You cannot make yogurt without critical ingredients: milk and some particular kinds of bacteria. If you do not have those two ingredients, there can be no fermentation, there will be no yogurt. *Our* interest, of course, is what are the ingredients that make for peace? What ingredients must be present in the community of faith for it to become an effective agent of peace; because, if they are not all there, we can do good things but there will be no peace.

So, first things first. This probably goes without saying but, to draw from Pope Paul VI’s words, there will be no peace without justice. So I need to admit that as I continue, my understanding of the relationship between peace and justice is that they are so closely tied together— theologically and practically—that it is nearly impossible to speak of one without the other. Having said that, the question restated is, “What ingredients have to be present for an outcome that looks like peace and justice, peace with justice, justice with peace?”

## **Six Critical Elements**

I want to describe, six critical elements that *have to be present* for there to be peace. We say we want peace; we even work, and work very hard, for peace. But all the necessary ingredients are not present. And because all of the ingredients are not present, the recipe simply cannot make for peace with justice. I believe we sincerely desire peace, and therefore we must not do it in sloppy or lazy fashion. I would like to suggest we must become more scientific, more exact, about this work of our heart, so that we do not invite each other into endless frustration and disappointment.

Here, then, are six ingredients I want to propose that are all critical, all essential for the church to be a potent agent of peace with justice.

## Relationships with Those at Risk

First, the Church—the People of God—must always be deliberate about our relationships with those who are at risk in the world. Catholic social teaching describes this, in part, as the “option for the poor and vulnerable” and as “solidarity.” I begin here, not because *you* need convincing, but because our churches, our parishes do. It is my experience of doing social ministry for the last twenty-five years, that the single biggest obstacle to the church’s mission and vision of peace with justice is the fact of the segregation of the poor/the oppressed/the exploited/the neglected/the stranger from the comfortable/the secure/the satisfied. The result is a divide that convinces the comfortable and secure that all is well and persuades the poor that there is no hope. The long-term result is death – dead bodies and dead dreams by starvation, drive-by shootings, desperation and war and dead *souls* and dead *hearts* by self-preoccupation and over-satiation. Together they create what looks like real hell.

Let me direct my words for a moment to those of you who come from communities that are somewhat comfortable or even affluent. And I want to be very specific, very practical. I want to suggest that each one of us, regardless of what else we do, must stay connected in some kind of face-to-face way with the persons and the places at risk.

The single biggest obstacle to the work of justice, to the work of peace, is not militarism, it is not consumerism, it is not political ideology. Those are all obstacles, to be sure, but in some ways they are simply symptoms of a bigger obstacle. The biggest obstacle is the absence of authentic compassion, a derivative of *agape*. People do not really care about each other. It sounds harsh, but it is not meant as an indictment. It is simply an observation. So many of us do not really care about each other. And we do not care, I think, not because we are malicious or unfeeling or mean but because we simply do not see each other. Our lives, our cities are all crafted like subtle little apartheid: all the rich people live with rich people, all the middle-class people live with middle-class people and the poor live with the poor in the places left behind. And so we do not care, perhaps we *cannot* care, about what we do not see, about what we do not know. Last summer I was in Greenville, South Carolina, listening to a group of JustFaith graduates who had participated during the program in a poverty tour of their own city. Some mentioned with distress and sadness and even shock that they had lived in Greenville all of their lives and never knew how desperately poor parts of the city were. Having seen those places, having prayed at those places, having considered those places through the lens of faith, some of them, many of them, most of them were obviously changed. *And now they care.* And their care now drives them into the first steps of active engagement.

Fr. Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest who works with gangs in Los Angeles perhaps one of the most faithful and holy people I have ever been in the presence of, makes this observation: “There will be no peace without justice. But there will be no justice *without kinship.*” We will not know what needs to be done in this world without seeing the world through the lens of those who see it from the bottom. There will be no justice without kinship. There will be no peace without kinship. Perhaps this is why so many of our greatest peacemakers choose to be with and among the poor. It is not enough for the people of God to sit at our computers in suburbia, clicking messages to members of congress. The reign of God is critically relational. We must be connected in real life, in real time, in *kairos* time. We learn much about God by looking into the eyes of the poor and vulnerable. And we discover that the world is much different than we thought. And we discover that we have a capacity—a holy capacity—to love bigger than we might have dreamed.

Our work for peace must be linked integrally with the experience of those on the bottom. Only when *they* know peace will peace be. As long as poverty is, violence will be. This means on a practical level that our recipe for peace must be a commitment to connect *ourselves* with those at the margins and a deliberate strategy of inviting others to *see* what they had not seen before. And we must hold each other accountable. If any one of us does not know well someone who is poor, cannot tell stories of conversation and interaction with someone who is poor, we are missing an ingredient for peace.

## Justice Education

The second critical ingredient, which flows out of the first, is justice education. It doesn't sound very sexy, but it does involve the matter of reclaiming our tradition as a Church. The single most repeated phrase in the Gospels is the phrase that Jesus uses to describe the vision and focus of his ministry: the Reign of God. We find it 142 times in the four Gospels. And as we gather the evidence from Jesus' teaching, this reign of God is the reign of service, reconciliation, justice, generosity, compassion and peacemaking. Jesus calls disciples to *this vision*. Is it fair to say that Jesus did not call disciples to follow him for the purpose of idolizing or honoring him? Rather, the reason to follow him is that he is pointing toward a new possibility—a holy possibility—described in this vision of the Reign of God.

One important appropriation of the biblical themes of justice is articulated in the language of Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching speaks to dignity, solidarity, the option for the poor, the rights of workers, care of creation, peace and so on. It is, in fact, an extraordinary tradition. The only problem is that it is so often not integrated in the life of the local faith community, the parish. It is, to use a tiresome and now pathetic phrase, “our best kept secret.” Many, if not most, pastors never studied Catholic social teaching while in seminary; most catechists are unfamiliar with the tradition. It is possible and usual for people to go through Catholic grade school, Catholic high school, Catholic college, Catholic youth group, the RCIA, Catholic spirituality programs, Catholic discipleship study groups and never encounter Catholic social teaching. And so often if they do, it is an afterthought, a kind of addendum or extracurricular activity. Twenty-five years ago, I spent three years at the University of Notre Dame getting a Master's of Divinity degree. Most of my classmates were men preparing for priesthood. Guess how many courses in Catholic social teaching were required as part of the curriculum? Zero. That was twenty-five years ago. Guess how many courses are required today, twenty-five years later? Zero.

I will say this: to the extent that people in the pews are not engaged with the poor, not involved in justice work, not committed to active peacemaking is an indictment of every single expression of Catholic education and formation – from the seminaries and spirituality centers to Catholic colleges and preparation for first communion.

This means on a very practical level that WE must provide opportunities for our fellow Catholics to become educated. And when I say “we,” I mean bishops and priests and deacons and religious and parishioners. And so whatever category you fit in, when I say “we,” I mean us – you and me. It may mean working with your DRE, your pastor or your bishop. It may also mean co-facilitating or supporting JustFaith within your parish.

We simply must be true to our tradition. We are really talking about the most critical work of naming what God we believe in. JustFaith Ministries offers a program called JusticeWalking to high school youth, and it is so very heartening to see how engaged and excited young people can become about their faith when they hear it spoken through the lens of God's intimate care for the world, for the poor, for the stranger, for the vulnerable, for the enemy. Similarly, it

sometimes surprises our staff to hear from JustFaith graduates who remark that they had been away from the Church for years and that the experience of JustFaith is the reason that they came back to the parish. People want to know that Catholicism is not primarily about bingo, picnics or basketball leagues. The excitement, passion, vision, energy and draw of the Gospel await.

## **Simpler Lifestyles**

The third critical ingredient necessary for a culture of peace and what may be the biggest challenge is that we must learn a new lifestyle, a simpler lifestyle. As Wendell Berry puts it, “We must learn to live poorer than we do.” The call to a simpler lifestyle is partially prompted by the observation that the world is at war because parts of the world are literally sucking the life out of the other parts. The history of affluence is the history of exploitation is the history of war. Our lifestyles require the plunder of the earth, require the cheap labor of other places, require the poverty of others. Our lifestyles require a war in Iraq. There is no other way to put it. For us to live as we live in this country, we need to dominate others so that they cannot use the limited resources that we want.

And our lifestyles not only put us at war with each other but with the natural order. The reality of global warming is sobering indeed. Record high temperatures are being set across the country. The familiar and sad images of polar bears drowning in the ocean because their hunting grounds have simply melted under temperatures never before recorded is only one ominous warning of what most likely is to come, and not just to polar bears. On a practical level, the two most significant lifestyle choices we can make to reduce our ecological footprint are to reduce or eliminate our use of planes and cars and to move towards a plant-based diet. I do not pretend to think that this will be easy. But to say we can’t change is the excuse of the addict, says Berry. We can’t continue to rely on that which will destroy us.

It is not enough to say that we must learn to reduce, reuse and recycle. We need to learn a very different way of living. If the American lifestyle requires, on average, four times its share of resources, it is not enough to snip around the edges of our consumerism. It is not enough to thumb our noses at Wal-Mart. We must learn how to reduce by 3/4 what we consume. Again, we need to hold each other accountable. We need to encourage each other to live in smaller homes, to buy less, to need less. Authentic love will not allow us to continue to ask the rest of the world to continue to put itself at the physical mercy of our conveniences. We will, I think, have to recover the language of sacrifice from our religious heritage. We simply cannot continue to draw from the booty of war and deprivation.

Some may argue that living a simpler life will not impact the war in Iraq, for example. And, in one sense, that is true. But if our lives say “more,” our lives say “war,” and our words for peace become pious but empty gestures. As we peacemakers speak peace with our lips, our lifestyles must also speak peace.

## **Take Time to Pray**

The fourth ingredient for culturing peace is that we must pray. We must learn to pray. We must take the time to pray. Prayer has multiple meanings, many expressions, and a thousand functions. But let me speak to its importance for culturing peace.

Prayer is a way of connecting with our Source. It is about being centered, grounded, mindful of the holy, the presence of the sacred and the precious. When I settle myself in the quiet and prayerful consideration of the reflections of Dorothy Day or Jean Vanier or Thomas Merton, I re-connect with what is true and holy. The hope is for integration, singleness of purpose, openness to a deepening relationship and a deepening commitment.

Kathleen Norris describes prayer this way: “Prayer is not asking for what you think you want, but asking to be changed in ways you can’t imagine.” We must be people of prayer, people who are centered, people who draw from a deep well. When I am in the presence of prayerful people, I am always struck by the sense that they are drawing from a source of goodness that only comes from attentiveness to the deepest places in their hearts.

Of course, the language of prayer is the language of spirituality. When my Protestant friends and I are trading denominational stories, they are always quick to mention the rich tradition of spirituality in the Catholic lexicon. Sadly, if Catholic social teaching is the best kept secret in the Catholic Church, the traditions of spirituality are the second best kept secret. You just don’t find too much of it at the parish level.

My thought is that we must be as good at praying as we are at strategizing for the peace rally. And then the two will become linked. Prayerful people host prayerful rallies, prayerful actions. Our work can become like a prayer – integrated, thoughtful, and wise.

The often unpublicized experience of those who pray is that prayer can help us to connect with the poor with open eyes and hearts. It is prayer that can allow us to educate with patience, love and understanding. It is prayer that can enable us to move to a simpler lifestyle. And it is prayer that will allow us to do this with conviction and joy.

And whether or not we pray is as obvious as whether or not we have put our clothes on. For example, the compulsive, frantic, angry, cynical, unintegrated rambling from project to project—even from peace project to peace project—may speak of good intentions, but also an uneasy and untended inner life. It is possible—I have committed this sin—to do much harm because we have not taken the time to pray. Untended hearts and spirits, like untended gardens, can go to weeds. Our good work for the world will be hampered if we do not do good work for our souls.

## **Commitment to Nonviolence**

The fifth ingredient is a commitment to nonviolence. We must learn—as surely as any serious consideration of Jesus’ life and message will reveal—that God does not smile upon violence. While the Church may recognize that in this complicated world some forms of violence seem, sadly, to be necessary, the presumption is that the threat and use of violence will always be a last, inadequate and reluctant resort. If, to protect the innocent in Kenya for example, it appears necessary to use force, it should be done with heavy heartedness and care.

One understated benefit of a commitment to a nonviolent, peacemaking love is that the lens of peacemaking gives us a capacity for discernment, a critical kind of discernment. As I remember the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the presumption against violence frees us to see what the world so often wants to hide its eyes from. Violence is awful. Violence is ugly. Violence is the saddest of human acts. As John Paul stated, “War is a defeat for humanity.” And to the extent that any human institution *relies on and promotes* violence is the extent to which it must be eyed suspiciously by the Church. Again, the point is discernment. Where is life honored? Where is it betrayed? It is so very difficult to lead people into a willing critique of their politics, their country, their allegiances, without some awareness of how violence is so often the handmaid of greed and power.

Perhaps that is why nonviolence is so difficult for people in our country to consider. When we have so much, and so much to protect, violence becomes more and more necessary. On the other hand, when our things become few, when we genuinely care for the poor here and abroad, when we know our tradition and have prayed well, the presumption of nonviolence becomes an

obvious and necessary spiritual movement. It becomes all too clear that those who have relied on violence only know a regret that is very hard to heal.

This means that the prayer of the Church, the teaching of the Church, the practice of the Church must always bend in the direction of nonviolent action, more specifically nonviolent, loving action. We are nonviolent, not because we simply eschew violence; rather, we are nonviolent because we are people who love like Jesus. When our lives are active and occupied in the name of doing good, there is little space for violence and doing harm.

## Community

The sixth and most often unacknowledged ingredient of effective peacemaking is community. The historical template of our religious tradition is that so often those people most committed to peacemaking and justice were also people committed to community. It would seem that the generativity of compassion and care that characterize a Gospel life issues into community. Big-heartedness always draws close to the other, always draws the other close. Francis of Assisi, Benedict, Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier—like Jesus himself—draw people naturally into relationship. And the hunger of the human heart that God put in us is not just for casual and recreational relationships. We long for relationships of meaning. We long to be connected, for healing, for vocation, and for mission.

Community is the most neglected and probably the most difficult ingredient for us to hold to in the U.S. context. And for the most obvious of reasons – we have come to worship at the altar of independence, individualism and autonomy. As much as there is a deep hunger for connection, common purpose, and kindred hearts, there is a merciless, deep-rooted entrenchment in the forces of competition, freedom and self-rule. We have, I fear, come to think of loneliness as necessary or inevitable.

The challenge before us, again, is to claim our tradition. From the description in Acts of the early Christian community that “shared all things in common,” to the early monastic families, to the development of the hundreds of canonical communities around the world, to the Catholic Worker communities of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, intentional community is what we are all about. Or at least it ought to be.

The spiritual logic of local communities of faith is that they can live a smaller but living version of what they seek for the larger world. Communities of faith speak that peace is possible and here’s an example, right here in our midst. It may not be perfect, it doesn’t have to be perfect, but it is a sign of how life can be nurtured and revered. The community of faith can be a place that witnesses to what is holy, good, loving and life-giving by what it lives, by what it embodies. But like the other ingredients for peace mentioned so far, community is a commitment, a choice. And it involves effort, discipline and struggle. It is certainly not easy.

As you might guess, when I say community I do not mean the bowling community, or even the church bowling community. Rather, I mean a community that makes very intentional commitments, including those I have mentioned so far: engagement with those on the margins, justice education or formation, simplicity, prayer, and peacemaking. And, for most people in most parishes, parish participation is also not where a robust experience of community like this happens. And even as small faith community movements and programs have started to become more and more popular across the country, most of the small faith communities I have witnessed at parishes have been woefully lacking in mission. They may pray, they may study, they may share a meal, but at the end of the day many of these communities dissolve simply because there was no mission that gave deeper meaning and purpose to their prayer and their

learning and their fellowship. Small faith communities without a mission can be just pious potlucks.

Our tradition suggests that it is very difficult to live a life of integrity apart from the support, encouragement, witness, challenge and celebration of a community. Community is, if you will, the medium in which so many other important things of the Gospel can happen. Community is an engine for peace, it is fuel for justice. We are made for each other. As a species we have always known that we could not survive, could not flourish without each other. Whatever is to prosper, grow, or multiply will only happen with the nourishment of people who are *for each other* in a significant way. Perhaps we need to borrow from the language of being a tribe. A Reign of God Tribe.

I am interested to see many more forms of intentional community than what we see today. And, I am interested to see the integration of intentional community within the parish. I would like to see the equivalent of Jesuit Volunteer Corps communities connected to every parish, where young people might commit to live for a term of two or three years, committed to the work of justice and peacemaking. I would like to see the parish encourage members to purchase homes in the vicinity of one another and in neighborhoods where there is greatest need, as an expression of the parish's work. I would like to see dioceses invite black and white and brown households into the faith-based mission of a covenant community, in which they meet weekly for the purpose of seeing where friendship and Gospel love will take them and teach them. I would like to see every parish have a version of a L'Arche community. I am interested in the construction of simple homes, affordable and available for both poor and rich, to create neighborhoods where all can live and interact and be helpful to each other.

## Closing

So, my brothers and sisters, I am suggesting that these six ingredients are essential elements of our faith tradition, essential elements of peacemaking – connection with those who suffer, the study of right relationships or peace and justice education, simple lifestyles, prayer, a commitment to nonviolence and community. On one hand, they seem like just basic, standard ordinary Gospel mandates. On the other hand, they represent significant challenges and opportunities for a Church that seeks to live out a Gospel vision of relationships that are transformative and healing.

I would like now to briefly address the matter of culturing peace, as in creating a culture of peace. Our work to cultivate or culture peace means that we must be reactive; we must resist the forces of violence. *And* we must be proactive; we must create a human culture that speaks to peace and justice. We must imagine what God's peace and justice look like on this earth, and we must begin the work of crafting structures, institutions, human realities that are the antithesis to division, hate, greed and scarcity, that anticipate and cultivate justice and goodness and peace.

So, can we imagine the Reign of God? Can we imagine 50 Catholic Worker communities in Seattle and 50 Catholic Worker communities in Louisville and 50 Catholic Worker communities in every major city in the country? Can we imagine diocesan-sponsored peace academies in every diocese? Can we imagine diocesan-promoted intentional neighborhoods of black and white and brown? Can we imagine Catholic construction companies that as part of their charter only build houses for integrated communities? Can we imagine peacemaking high schools – magnet Catholic high schools for those interested in studying Catholic social teaching, peacemaking strategies and liberating lifestyles? Can we imagine construction companies that only build modest homes out of local materials with conservation and simplicity as the key philosophies? Can we imagine designated prayer houses in those neighborhoods where violence is greatest, so

that all people across the city can pray for a new possibility, and then work for what they pray? Can we imagine annual peacemaking awards in every parish and in every diocese, and that the event is the biggest banquet on the church calendar? Can we imagine parish picnics that are open to all and free to the poor? Can we imagine institutes to train would-be or veteran politicians in the ways and needs of peace? Can we imagine the churches encouraging bicycling – lots of racks – with opportunities to turn in our cars (and our guns) in for a new way? Can we imagine conflict resolution and Catholic social teaching and the study of justice as core courses in every Catholic high school and Catholic college, starting with the University of Notre Dame? Can we imagine “green” companies being started with funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development? Can we imagine the repopulation of farming communities with the financial support of parish communities in the city, which the farmers can then serve in a personal and direct way? Can we imagine, in an era of privately owned and run prisons, that the Catholic Church would buy and run a prison, simply to demonstrate what it means to try to LOVE and help RESTORE those who are inside? Can we imagine a church that tells its members to get rid of their guns, to get rid of their children’s video game guns? Can we imagine a church filled with peacemakers and prophets, where seeking justice, making peace, loving the broken and dreaming a new dream for the world is our prayer?

My sisters and brothers in Christ, the pursuit of peace in a culture of violence involves the creation of a new culture. So let’s get to work. And may peace go with us.





## God is Love

ENCYCLICAL LETTER, ***DEUS CARITAS EST***, OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF **BENEDICT XVI** TO THE BISHOPS PRIESTS AND DEACONS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS, AND ALL THE LAY FAITHFUL ON CHRISTIAN LOVE.

### INTRODUCTION

1. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (*1 Jn 4:16*). These words from the *First Letter of John* express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us”.

*We have come to believe in God's love:* in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life” (3:16). In acknowledging the centrality of love, Christian faith has retained the core of Israel's faith, while at the same time giving it new depth and breadth. The pious Jew prayed daily the words of the *Book of Deuteronomy* which expressed the heart of his existence: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:4-5). Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbour found in the *Book of Leviticus*: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (19:18; cf. *Mk 12:29-31*). Since God has first loved us (cf. *1 Jn 4:10*), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.

In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. That, in essence, is what the two main parts of this Letter are about, and they are profoundly interconnected. The first part is more speculative, 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, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love. The second part is more concrete, since it treats the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbour. The argument has vast implications, but a lengthy treatment would go beyond the scope of the present Encyclical. I wish to emphasize some basic elements, so as to call forth in the world renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God's love.

# PART I: THE UNITY OF LOVE IN CREATION AND IN SALVATION HISTORY

## *A problem of language*

2. God's love for us is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are. In considering this, we immediately find ourselves hampered by a problem of language. Today, the term “love” has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings. Even though this Encyclical will deal primarily with the understanding and practice of love in sacred Scripture and in the Church's Tradition, we cannot simply prescind from the meaning of the word in the different cultures and in present-day usage.

Let us first of all bring to mind the vast semantic range of the word “love”: we speak of love of country, love of one's profession, love between friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbour and love of God. Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison. So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?

## *“Eros” and “Agape” – difference and unity*

3. That love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings, was called *eros* by the ancient Greeks. Let us note straight away that the Greek Old Testament uses the word *eros* only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all: of the three Greek words for love, *eros*, *philia* (the love of friendship) and *agape*, New Testament writers prefer the last, which occurs rather infrequently in Greek usage. As for the term *philia*, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in Saint John's Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The tendency to avoid the word *eros*, together with the new vision of love expressed through the word *agape*, clearly point to something new and distinct about the Christian understanding of love. In the critique of Christianity which began with the Enlightenment and grew progressively more radical, this new element was seen as something thoroughly negative. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Christianity had poisoned *eros*, which for its part, while not completely succumbing, gradually degenerated into vice.[1] Here the German philosopher was expressing a widely-held perception: doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness the most precious thing in life? Doesn't she blow the whistle just when the joy which is the Creator's gift offers us a happiness which is itself a certain foretaste of the Divine?

4. But is this the case? Did Christianity really destroy *eros*? Let us take a look at the pre-Christian world. The Greeks—not unlike other cultures—considered *eros* principally as a kind of intoxication, the overpowering of reason by a “divine madness” which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him, in the very process of being overwhelmed by divine power, to experience supreme happiness. All other powers in heaven and on earth thus appear secondary: “*Omnia vincit amor*” says Virgil in the *Bucolics*—love conquers all—and he adds: “*et nos cedamus amori*”—let us, too, yield to love.[2] In the religions, this attitude found expression in fertility cults, part of which was the “sacred” prostitution which flourished in many temples. *Eros* was thus celebrated as divine power, as fellowship with the Divine.

The Old Testament firmly opposed this form of religion, which represents a powerful temptation against monotheistic faith, combating it as a perversion of religiosity. But it in no way rejected *eros* as such; rather, it declared war on a warped and destructive form of it, because this counterfeit divinization of *eros* actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it. Indeed, the prostitutes in the temple, who had to bestow this divine intoxication, were not treated as human beings and persons, but simply used as a means of arousing “divine madness”: far from being goddesses, they were human persons being exploited. An intoxicated and undisciplined *eros*, then, is not an ascent in “ecstasy” towards the Divine, but a fall, a degradation of man. Evidently, *eros* needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.

5. Two things emerge clearly from this rapid overview of the concept of *eros* past and present. First, there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence. Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or “poisoning” *eros*, they heal it and restore its true grandeur.

This is due first and foremost to the fact that man is a being made up of body and soul. Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of *eros* can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. The epicure Gassendi used to offer Descartes the humorous greeting: “O Soul!” And Descartes would reply: “O Flesh!”.[3] Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love —*eros*—able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, reduced to pure “sex”, has become a commodity, a mere “thing” to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great “yes” to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, *eros* tends to rise “in ecstasy” towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

6. Concretely, what does this path of ascent and purification entail? How might love be experienced so that it can fully realize its human and divine promise? Here we can find a first, important indication in the *Song of Songs*, an Old Testament book well known to the mystics. According to the interpretation generally held today, the poems contained in this book were originally love-songs, perhaps intended for a Jewish wedding feast and meant to exalt conjugal

love. In this context it is highly instructive to note that in the course of the book two different Hebrew words are used to indicate “love”. First there is the word *dodim*, a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. This comes to be replaced by the word *ababa*, which the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding *agape*, which, as we have seen, becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, “searching” love, this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.

It is part of love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being “for ever”. Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed “ecstasy”, not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it” (*Lk* 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. *Mt* 10:39; 16:25; *Mk* 8:35; *Lk* 9:24; *Jn* 12:25). In these words, Jesus portrays his own path, which leads through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfilment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself.

7. By their own inner logic, these initial, somewhat philosophical reflections on the essence of love have now brought us to the threshold of biblical faith. We began by asking whether the different, or even opposed, meanings of the word “love” point to some profound underlying unity, or whether on the contrary they must remain unconnected, one alongside the other. More significantly, though, we questioned whether the message of love proclaimed to us by the Bible and the Church's Tradition has some points of contact with the common human experience of love, or whether it is opposed to that experience. This in turn led us to consider two fundamental words: *eros*, as a term to indicate “worldly” love and *agape*, referring to love grounded in and shaped by faith. The two notions are often contrasted as “ascending” love and “descending” love. There are other, similar classifications, such as the distinction between possessive love and oblation love (*amor concupiscentiae* – *amor benevolentiae*), to which is sometimes also added love that seeks its own advantage.

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—*eros*—would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture. Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life. Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved,

bestows itself and wants to “be there for” the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. 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).

In the account of Jacob's ladder, the Fathers of the Church saw this inseparable connection between ascending and descending love, between *eros* which seeks God and *agape* which passes on the gift received, symbolized in various ways. In that biblical passage we read how the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream, above the stone which was his pillow, a ladder reaching up to heaven, on which the angels of God were ascending and descending (cf. *Gen* 28:12; *Jn* 1:51). A particularly striking interpretation of this vision is presented by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Rule*. He tells us that the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation. Only in this way will he be able to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own: “*per pietatis viscera in se infirmitatem caeterorum transferat*”.[4] Saint Gregory speaks in this context of Saint Paul, who was borne aloft to the most exalted mysteries of God, and hence, having descended once more, he was able to become all things to all men (cf. *2 Cor* 12:2-4; *1 Cor* 9:22). He also points to the example of Moses, who entered the tabernacle time and again, remaining in dialogue with God, so that when he emerged he could be at the service of his people. “Within [the tent] he is borne aloft through contemplation, while without he is completely engaged in helping those who suffer: *intus in contemplationem rapitur, foris infirmantium negotiis urgetur.*”[5]

8. We have thus come to an initial, albeit still somewhat generic response to the two questions raised earlier. Fundamentally, “love” is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love. And we have also seen, synthetically, that biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it. This newness of biblical faith is shown chiefly in two elements which deserve to be highlighted: the image of God and the image of man.

### ***The newness of biblical faith***

9. First, the world of the Bible presents us with a new image of God. In surrounding cultures, the image of God and of the gods ultimately remained unclear and contradictory. In the development of biblical faith, however, the content of the prayer fundamental to Israel, the *Shema*, became increasingly clear and unequivocal: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (*Dt* 6:4). There is only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who is thus the God of all. Two facts are significant about this statement: all other gods are not God, and the universe in which we live has its source in God and was created by him. Certainly, the notion of creation is found elsewhere, yet only here does it become absolutely clear that it is not one god among many, but the one true God himself who is the source of all that exists; the whole world comes into existence by the power of his creative Word. Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and “made” by him. The second important element now emerges: this God loves man. The divine power that Aristotle at the height of Greek philosophy sought to grasp through reflection, is indeed for every being an object of desire and of love—and as the object of love this divinity moves the world[6]—but in itself it lacks nothing and does not love: it is solely the object of love. 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*.

The Prophets, particularly Hosea and Ezekiel, described God's passion for his people using boldly erotic images. God's relationship with Israel is described using the metaphors of betrothal and marriage; idolatry is thus adultery and prostitution. Here we find a specific reference—as we have seen—to the fertility cults and their abuse of *eros*, but also a description of the relationship of fidelity between Israel and her God. The history of the love-relationship between God and Israel consists, at the deepest level, in the fact that he gives her the *Torah*, thereby opening Israel's eyes to man's true nature and showing her the path leading to true humanism. It consists in the fact that man, through a life of fidelity to the one God, comes to experience himself as loved by God, and discovers joy in truth and in righteousness—a joy in God which becomes his essential happiness: “Whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you ... for me it is good to be near God” (*Ps* 73 [72]:25, 28).

10. We have seen that God's *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. Hosea above all shows us that this *agape* dimension of God's love for man goes far beyond the aspect of gratuity. Israel has committed “adultery” and has broken the covenant; God should judge and repudiate her. It is precisely at this point that God is revealed to be God and not man: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! ... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst” (*Hos* 11:8-9). 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. Here Christians can see a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love.

The philosophical dimension to be noted in this biblical vision, and its importance from the standpoint of the history of religions, lies in the fact that on the one hand we find ourselves before a strictly metaphysical image of God: God is the absolute and ultimate source of all being; but this universal principle of creation—the *Logos*, primordial reason—is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. *Eros* is thus supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape*. We can thus see how the reception of the *Song of Songs* in the canon of sacred Scripture was soon explained by the idea that these love songs ultimately describe God's relation to man and man's relation to God. Thus the *Song of Songs* became, both in Christian and Jewish literature, a source of mystical knowledge and experience, an expression of the essence of biblical faith: that man can indeed enter into union with God—his primordial aspiration. But this union is no mere fusion, a sinking in the nameless ocean of the Divine; it is a unity which creates love, a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one. As Saint Paul says: “He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (*1 Cor* 6:17).

11. The first novelty of biblical faith consists, as we have seen, in its image of God. The second, essentially connected to this, is found in the image of man. The biblical account of creation speaks of the solitude of Adam, the first man, and God's decision to give him a helper. Of all other creatures, not one is capable of being the helper that man needs, even though he has assigned a name to all the wild beasts and birds and thus made them fully a part of his life. So God forms woman from the rib of man. Now Adam finds the helper that he needed: “This at

last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen* 2:23). Here one might detect hints of ideas that are also found, for example, in the myth mentioned by Plato, according to which man was originally spherical, because he was complete in himself and self-sufficient. But as a punishment for pride, he was split in two by Zeus, so that now he longs for his other half, striving with all his being to possess it and thus regain his integrity.[8] While the biblical narrative does not speak of punishment, the idea is certainly present that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become “complete”. The biblical account thus concludes with a prophecy about Adam: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh” (*Gen* 2:24).

Two aspects of this are important. First, *eros* is somehow rooted in man's very nature; Adam is a seeker, who “abandons his mother and father” in order to find woman; only together do the two represent complete humanity and become “one flesh”. The second aspect is equally important. From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfil its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.

### ***Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God***

12. Though up to now we have been speaking mainly of the Old Testament, nevertheless the profound compenetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. 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.

13. Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. *Jn* 6:31-33). The ancient world had dimly perceived that man's real food—what truly nourishes him as man—is ultimately the *Logos*, eternal wisdom: this same *Logos* now truly becomes food for us—as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental “mysticism”, grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a

radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.

14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental “mysticism” is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become “one body”, completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality—something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship and *ethos* are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. “Worship” itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.

15. This principle is the starting-point for understanding the great parables of Jesus. The rich man (cf. Lk 16:19-31) begs from his place of torment that his brothers be informed about what happens to those who simply ignore the poor man in need. Jesus takes up this cry for help as a warning to help us return to the right path. The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of “neighbour” was understood as referring essentially to one's countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of “neighbour” is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now. The Church has the duty to interpret ever anew this relationship between near and far with regard to the actual daily life of her members. Lastly, we should especially mention the great parable of the Last Judgement (cf. Mt 25:31-46), in which love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.

### ***Love of God and love of neighbour***

16. Having reflected on the nature of love and its meaning in biblical faith, we are left with two questions concerning our own attitude: can we love God without seeing him? And can love be commanded? Against the double commandment of love these questions raise a double objection. No one has ever seen God, so how could we love him? Moreover, love cannot be



commanded; it is ultimately a feeling that is either there or not, nor can it be produced by the will. Scripture seems to reinforce the first objection when it states: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). But this text hardly excludes the love of God as something impossible. On the contrary, the whole context of the passage quoted from the *First Letter of John* shows that such love is explicitly demanded. The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God.

17. True, no one has ever seen God as he is. And yet God is not totally invisible to us; he does not remain completely inaccessible. God loved us first, says the *Letter of John* quoted above (cf. 4:10), and this love of God has appeared in our midst. He has become visible in as much as he "has sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 Jn 4:9). God has made himself visible: in Jesus we are able to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Indeed, God is visible in a number of ways. In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of his heart on the Cross, to his appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, he guided the nascent Church along its path. Nor has the Lord been absent from subsequent Church history: he encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. In the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. He has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love. God does not demand of us a feeling which we ourselves are incapable of producing. He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has "loved us first", love can also blossom as a response within us.

In the gradual unfolding of this encounter, it is clearly revealed that love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvellous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love. Earlier we spoke of the process of purification and maturation by which *eros* comes fully into its own, becomes love in the full meaning of the word. It is characteristic of mature love that it calls into play all man's potentialities; it engages the whole man, so to speak. Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken within us a feeling of joy born of the experience of being loved. But this encounter also engages our will and our intellect. Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the "yes" of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never "finished" and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself. *Idem velle atque idem nolle* [9]—to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing—was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself.[10] Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23-28).

18. Love of neighbour is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern. This I can offer them not only through the organizations intended for such purposes, accepting it perhaps as a political necessity. Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbour which the *First Letter of John* speaks of with such insistence. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be “devout” and to perform my “religious duties”, then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely “proper”, but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. The saints—consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta—constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is “divine” because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a “we” which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

## **PART II: CARITAS**

### **THE PRACTICE OF LOVE BY THE CHURCH AS A “COMMUNITY OF LOVE”**

#### *The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love*

19. “If you see charity, you see the Trinity”, wrote Saint Augustine.<sup>[11]</sup> In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. *Jn* 19:37, *Zech* 12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. *Jn* 3:16), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross—as Saint John tells us—Jesus “gave up his Spirit” (*Jn* 19:30), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. *Jn* 20:22). This was to fulfil the promise of “rivers of living water” that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. *Jn* 7:38-39). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. *Jn* 13:1, 15:13).

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an

undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this *service of charity*, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

### ***Charity as a responsibility of the Church***

20. Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community. 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; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (*Acts* 2:44-5). In these words, Saint Luke provides a kind of definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements include fidelity to the “teaching of the Apostles”, “communion” (*koinonia*), “the breaking of the bread” and “prayer” (cf. *Acts* 2:42). The element of “communion” (*koinonia*) is not initially defined, but appears concretely in the verses quoted above: it consists in the fact that believers hold all things in common and that among them, there is no longer any distinction between rich and poor (cf. also *Acts* 4:32-37). As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not in fact be preserved. But its essential core remained: within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life.

21. A decisive step in the difficult search for ways of putting this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice is illustrated in the choice of the seven, which marked the origin of the diaconal office (cf. *Acts* 6:5-6). In the early Church, in fact, with regard to the daily distribution to widows, a disparity had arisen between Hebrew speakers and Greek speakers. The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with “prayer” (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the “ministry of the word”, felt over-burdened by “serving tables”, so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons. Nor was this group to carry out a purely mechanical work of distribution: they were to be men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (cf. *Acts* 6:1-6). In other words, the social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbour. With the formation of this group of seven, “*diaconia*”—the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way—became part of the fundamental structure of the Church.

22. As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. A few references will suffice to demonstrate this. Justin Martyr († c. 155) in speaking of the Christians' celebration of Sunday, also mentions their charitable activity, linked with the Eucharist as such. Those who are able make offerings in accordance with their means, each as he or she wishes; the Bishop in turn makes use of these to support orphans, widows, the sick and those who for other reasons find themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners.<sup>[12]</sup> The great Christian writer Tertullian († after 220) relates how the pagans were

struck by the Christians' concern for the needy of every sort.[13] And when Ignatius of Antioch († c. 117) described the Church of Rome as “presiding in charity (*agape*)”, [14] we may assume that with this definition he also intended in some sense to express her concrete charitable activity.

23. Here it might be helpful to allude to the earliest legal structures associated with the service of charity in the Church. Towards the middle of the fourth century we see the development in Egypt of the “*diaconia*”: the institution within each monastery responsible for all works of relief, that is to say, for the service of charity. By the sixth century this institution had evolved into a corporation with full juridical standing, which the civil authorities themselves entrusted with part of the grain for public distribution. In Egypt not only each monastery, but each individual Diocese eventually had its own *diaconia*; this institution then developed in both East and West. Pope Gregory the Great († 604) mentions the *diaconia* of Naples, while in Rome the *diaconiae* are documented from the seventh and eighth centuries. But charitable activity on behalf of the poor and suffering was naturally an essential part of the Church of Rome from the very beginning, based on the principles of Christian life given in the *Acts of the Apostles*. It found a vivid expression in the case of the deacon Lawrence († 258). The dramatic description of Lawrence's martyrdom was known to Saint Ambrose († 397) and it provides a fundamentally authentic picture of the saint. As the one responsible for the care of the poor in Rome, Lawrence had been given a period of time, after the capture of the Pope and of Lawrence's fellow deacons, to collect the treasures of the Church and hand them over to the civil authorities. He distributed to the poor whatever funds were available and then presented to the authorities the poor themselves as the real treasure of the Church.[15] Whatever historical reliability one attributes to these details, Lawrence has always remained present in the Church's memory as a great exponent of ecclesial charity.

24. A mention of the emperor Julian the Apostate († 363) can also show how essential the early Church considered the organized practice of charity. As a child of six years, Julian witnessed the assassination of his father, brother and other family members by the guards of the imperial palace; rightly or wrongly, he blamed this brutal act on the Emperor Constantius, who passed himself off as an outstanding Christian. The Christian faith was thus definitively discredited in his eyes. Upon becoming emperor, Julian decided to restore paganism, the ancient Roman religion, while reforming it in the hope of making it the driving force behind the empire. In this project he was amply inspired by Christianity. He established a hierarchy of metropolitans and priests who were to foster love of God and neighbour. In one of his letters,[16] he wrote that the sole aspect of Christianity which had impressed him was the Church's charitable activity. He thus considered it essential for his new pagan religion that, alongside the system of the Church's charity, an equivalent activity of its own be established. According to him, this was the reason for the popularity of the “Galileans”. They needed now to be imitated and outdone. In this way, then, the Emperor confirmed that charity was a decisive feature of the Christian community, the Church.

25. Thus far, two essential facts have emerged from our reflections:

a) 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 is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.[17]

b) The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas-agape* extends beyond the frontiers of the Church.

The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter “by chance” (cf. *Lk* 10:31), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the *Letter to the Galatians* is emphatic: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (6:10).

### ***Justice and Charity***

26. Since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church's charitable activity, subsequently developed with particular insistence by Marxism: the poor, it is claimed, do not need charity but justice. Works of charity—almsgiving—are in effect a way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the *status quo*, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity. There is admittedly some truth to this argument, but also much that is mistaken. It is true that the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods. This has always been emphasized by Christian teaching on the State and by the Church's social doctrine. Historically, the issue of the just ordering of the collectivity had taken a new dimension with the industrialization of society in the nineteenth century. The rise of modern industry caused the old social structures to collapse, while the growth of a class of salaried workers provoked radical changes in the fabric of society. The relationship between capital and labour now became the decisive issue—an issue which in that form was previously unknown. Capital and the means of production were now the new source of power which, concentrated in the hands of a few, led to the suppression of the rights of the working classes, against which they had to rebel.

27. 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. There were some pioneers, such as Bishop Ketteler of Mainz († 1877), and concrete needs were met by a growing number of groups, associations, leagues, federations and, in particular, by the new religious orders founded in the nineteenth century to combat poverty, disease and the need for better education. In 1891, the papal magisterium intervened with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII. This was followed in 1931 by Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. In 1961 Blessed John XXIII published the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, while Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), insistently addressed the social problem, which had meanwhile become especially acute in Latin America. My great predecessor John Paul II left us a trilogy of social Encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and finally *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Faced with new situations and issues, Catholic social teaching thus gradually developed, and has now found a comprehensive presentation in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council *Iustitia et Pax*. Marxism had seen world revolution and its preliminaries as the panacea for the social problem: revolution and the subsequent collectivization of the means of production, so it was claimed, would immediately change things for the better. This illusion has vanished. In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to

be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.

28. In order to define more accurately the relationship between the necessary commitment to justice and the ministry of charity, two fundamental situations need to be considered:

a) The just ordering of society and 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 iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?*”.[18] Fundamental to Christianity is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (cf. *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.[19] The State may not impose religion, yet it must guarantee religious freedom and harmony between the followers of different religions. For her part, the Church, as the social expression of Christian faith, has a proper independence and is structured on the basis of her faith as a community which the State must recognize. The two spheres are distinct, yet always interrelated.

Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. But this presupposes an even more radical question: what is justice? The problem is one of practical reason; but if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests.

Here politics and faith meet. Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God—an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.

The Church's social teaching argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being. It recognizes that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, 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.

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. 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.

b) Love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable.[20] The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support. In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live “by bread alone” (*Mt*4:4; cf. *Dt* 8:3)—a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.

29. We can now determine more precisely, in the life of the Church, the relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*.”[21] The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility.[22] Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity”. [23]

The Church's charitable organizations, on the other hand, constitute an *opus proprium*, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature. The Church can never be exempted from practising charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love.

## ***The multiple structures of charitable service in the social context of the present day***

30. Before attempting to define the specific profile of the Church's activities in the service of man, I now wish to consider the overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world of today.

a) Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This “togetherness” at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbours in need. The Second Vatican Council had made this point very clearly: “Now that, through better means of communication, distances between peoples have been almost eliminated, charitable activity can and should embrace all people and all needs.”<sup>[24]</sup>

On the other hand—and here we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization—we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care. Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that “among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing, inescapable sense of solidarity between all peoples.”<sup>[25]</sup> State agencies and humanitarian associations work to promote this, the former mainly through subsidies or tax relief, the latter by making available considerable resources. The solidarity shown by civil society thus significantly surpasses that shown by individuals.

b) This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favouring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.<sup>[26]</sup> Numerous organizations for charitable or philanthropic purposes have also been established and these are committed to achieving adequate humanitarian solutions to the social and political problems of the day. Significantly, our time has also seen the growth and spread of different kinds of volunteer work, which assume responsibility for providing a variety of services.<sup>[27]</sup> I wish here to offer a special word of gratitude and appreciation to all those who take part in these activities in whatever way. For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves. The anti-culture of death, which finds expression for example in drug use, is thus countered by an unselfish love which shows itself to be a culture of life by the very willingness to “lose itself” (cf. *Lk 17:33 et passim*) for others.

In the Catholic Church, and also in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, new forms of charitable activity have arisen, while other, older ones have taken on new life and energy. In these new forms, it is often possible to establish a fruitful link between evangelization and works of charity. Here I would clearly reaffirm what my great predecessor John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* <sup>[28]</sup> when he asserted the readiness of the Catholic Church to cooperate with the charitable agencies of these Churches and Communities, since we all have the same fundamental motivation and look towards the same goal: a true humanism, which



acknowledges that man is made in the image of God and wants to help him to live in a way consonant with that dignity. His Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* emphasized that the building of a better world requires Christians to speak with a united voice in working to inculcate “respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenceless.” [29] Here I would like to express my satisfaction that this appeal has found a wide resonance in numerous initiatives throughout the world.

### ***The distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity***

31. The increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbour is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature. It is also a result of the presence of Christianity in the world, since Christianity constantly revives and acts out this imperative, so often profoundly obscured in the course of time. The reform of paganism attempted by the emperor Julian the Apostate is only an initial example of this effect; here we see how the power of Christianity spread well beyond the frontiers of the Christian faith. For this reason, it is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintains all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance. So what are the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial charity?

a) Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. The Church's charitable organizations, beginning with those of *Caritas* (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. *Gal* 5:6).

b) 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. The modern age, particularly from the nineteenth century on, has been dominated by various versions of a philosophy of progress whose most radical form is Marxism. 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 a potential revolution and thus blocks the struggle for a better world. Seen in this way, charity is rejected and attacked as a means of preserving the *status quo*. What we have here, though, is really an inhuman philosophy. People of the present are sacrificed to the *moloch* of the future—a future whose effective realization is at best doubtful. One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now. We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have

the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programmes. The Christian's programme—the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is “a heart which sees”. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

d) Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends.[30] But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love. He knows—to return to the questions raised earlier—that disdain for love is disdain for God and man alike; it is an attempt to do without God. Consequently, the best defence of God and man consists precisely in love. It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.

### ***Those responsible for the Church's charitable activity***

32. Finally, we must turn our attention once again to those who are responsible for carrying out the Church's charitable activity. As our preceding reflections have made clear, the true subject of the various Catholic organizations that carry out a ministry of charity is the Church herself—at all levels, from the parishes, through the particular Churches, to the universal Church. For this reason it was most opportune that my venerable predecessor Paul VI established the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* as the agency of the Holy See responsible for orienting and coordinating the organizations and charitable activities promoted by the Catholic Church. In conformity with the episcopal structure of the Church, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are charged with primary responsibility for carrying out in the particular Churches the programme set forth in the *Acts of the Apostles* (cf. 2:42-44): today as in the past, the Church as God's family must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help. In the rite of episcopal ordination, prior to the act of consecration itself, the candidate must respond to several questions which express the essential elements of his office and recall the duties of his future ministry. He promises expressly to be, in the Lord's name, welcoming and merciful to the poor and to all those in need of consolation and assistance.[31] The *Code of Canon Law*, in the canons on the ministry of the Bishop, does not expressly mention charity as a specific sector of episcopal activity, but speaks in general terms of the Bishop's responsibility for coordinating the different works of the apostolate with due regard for their proper character.[32] Recently, however, the *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* explored more specifically the duty of charity as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese,[33] and it emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning.[34]

33. With regard to the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity on the practical level, the essential has already been said: they must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love (cf. *Gal* 5:6). Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them a love of neighbour. The criterion inspiring their activity should be Saint Paul's statement in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*: "the love of Christ urges us on" (5:14). The consciousness that, in Christ, God has given himself for us, even unto death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others. Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ. The personnel of every Catholic charitable organization want to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the love of God can spread throughout the world. By their sharing in the Church's practice of love, they wish to be witnesses of God and of Christ, and they wish for this very reason freely to do good to all.

34. Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. *1 Cor* 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (v. 3). This hymn must be the *Magna Carta* of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

35. This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world—the Cross—and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: "We are useless servants" (*Lk* 17:10). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (*2 Cor* 5:14).

36. When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt

for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others. Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbours, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: “We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer”.

37. It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work. Clearly, the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism. An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God, accusing him of allowing poverty and failing to have compassion for his creatures. When people claim to build a case against God in defence of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless?

38. Certainly Job could complain before God about the presence of incomprehensible and apparently unjustified suffering in the world. In his pain he cried out: “Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! ... I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? ... Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me” (23:3, 5-6, 15-16). Often we cannot understand why God refrains from intervening. Yet he does not prevent us from crying out, like Jesus on the Cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). We should continue asking this question in prayerful dialogue before his face: “Lord, holy and true, how long will it be?” (Rev 6:10). It is Saint Augustine who gives us faith's answer to our sufferings: “*Si comprehendis, non est Deus*”—“if you understand him, he is not God.” [35] Our protest is not meant to challenge God, or to suggest that error, weakness or indifference can be found in him. For the believer, it is impossible to imagine that God is powerless or that “perhaps he is asleep” (cf. 1 Kg 18:27). Instead, our crying out is, as it was for Jesus on the Cross, the deepest and most radical way of affirming our faith in his sovereign power. Even in their bewilderment and failure to understand the world around them, Christians continue to believe in the “goodness and loving kindness of God” (Tit 3:4). Immersed like everyone else in the dramatic complexity of historical events, they remain unshakably certain that God is our Father and loves us, even when his silence remains incomprehensible.

39. Faith, hope and charity go together. Hope is practised through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure, and through the virtue of humility, which accepts God's mystery and trusts him even at times of darkness. Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that it is really true: God is love! It thus transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands and that, as the dramatic imagery of the end of the Book of Revelation points out, in spite of all darkness he ultimately triumphs in glory. Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light—and in the end, the only light—that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage

needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practise it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world—this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical.

## CONCLUSION

40. Finally, let us consider the saints, who exercised charity in an exemplary way. Our thoughts turn especially to Martin of Tours († 397), the soldier who became a monk and a bishop: he is almost like an icon, illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity. At the gates of Amiens, Martin gave half of his cloak to a poor man: Jesus himself, that night, appeared to him in a dream wearing that cloak, confirming the permanent validity of the Gospel saying: “I was naked and you clothed me ... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt*25:36, 40).<sup>[36]</sup> Yet in the history of the Church, how many other testimonies to charity could be quoted! In particular, the entire monastic movement, from its origins with Saint Anthony the Abbot († 356), expresses an immense service of charity towards neighbour. In his encounter “face to face” with the God who is Love, the monk senses the impelling need to transform his whole life into service of neighbour, in addition to service of God. This explains the great emphasis on hospitality, refuge and care of the infirm in the vicinity of the monasteries. It also explains the immense initiatives of human welfare and Christian formation, aimed above all at the very poor, who became the object of care firstly for 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, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, 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.

41. Outstanding among the saints is Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness. In the *Gospel of Luke* we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she remained for “about three months” (1:56) so as to assist her in the final phase of her pregnancy. “*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*”, she says on the occasion of that visit, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (*Lk* 1:46). In these words she expresses her whole programme of life: not setting herself at the centre, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbour—only then does goodness enter the world. Mary's greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (cf. *Lk* 1:38, 48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God's promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: “Blessed are you who believed”, Elizabeth says to her (cf. *Lk* 1:45). The *Magnificat*—a portrait, so to speak, of her soul—is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God's thoughts and wills with God's will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves. We sense this in her quiet gestures, as recounted by the infancy narratives in the Gospel. We see it in the delicacy with

which she recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus. We see it in the humility with which she recedes into the background during Jesus' public life, knowing that the Son must establish a new family and that the Mother's hour will come only with the Cross, which will be Jesus' true hour (cf. *Jn* 2:4; 13:1). When the disciples flee, Mary will remain beneath the Cross (cf. *Jn* 19:25-27); later, at the hour of Pentecost, it will be they who gather around her as they wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14).

42. The lives of the saints are not limited to their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them. In no one do we see this more clearly than in Mary. The words addressed by the crucified Lord to his disciple—to John and through him to all disciples of Jesus: “Behold, your mother!” (*Jn* 19:27)—are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavours. They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that pure love which is not self-seeking but simply benevolent. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him—a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which “flow rivers of living water” (*Jn* 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power. To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
you have given the world its true light,  
Jesus, your Son – the Son of God.  
You abandoned yourself completely  
to God's call  
and thus became a wellspring  
of the goodness which flows forth from him.  
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.  
Teach us to know and love him,  
so that we too can become  
capable of true love  
and be fountains of living water  
in the midst of a thirsting world.

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 December, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, in the year 2005, the first of my Pontificate.*

#### **BENEDICTUS PP. XVI**

- [1] Cf. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, IV, 168.
- [2] X, 69.
- [3] Cf. R. Descartes, *Œuvres*, ed. V. Cousin, vol. 12, Paris 1824, pp. 95ff.
- [4] II, 5: SCh 381, 196.
- [5] *Ibid.*, 198.
- [6] Cf. *Metaphysics*, XII, 7.
- [7] Cf. Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, who in his treatise *The Divine Names*, IV, 12-14: PG 3, 709-713 calls God both *eros* and *agape*.
- [8] Plato, *Symposium*, XIV-XV, 189c-192d.
- [9] Sallust, *De coniuratione Catilinae*, XX, 4.
- [10] Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11: CCL 27, 32.
- [11] *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12: CCL 50, 287.
- [12] Cf. *I Apologia*, 67: PG 6, 429.
- [13] Cf. *Apologeticum*, 39, 7: PL 1, 468.
- [14] *Ep. ad Rom., Inscr*: PG 5, 801.
- [15] Cf. Saint Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum*, II, 28, 140: PL 16, 141.
- [16] Cf. *Ep.* 83: J. Bidez, *L'Empereur Julien. Œuvres complètes*, Paris 1960<sup>2</sup>, v. I, 2<sup>a</sup>, p. 145.
- [17] Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 194, Vatican City 2004, p. 213.
- [18] *De Civitate Dei*, IV, 4: CCL 47, 102.
- [19] Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.
- [20] Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 197, Vatican City 2004, p. 217.
- [21] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 42: AAS 81 (1989), 472.
- [22] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002), 1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 22 January 2003, p. 5.
- [23] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1939.
- [24] Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8.
- [25] *Ibid.*, 14.
- [26] Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 195, Vatican City 2004, pp. 214-216.
- [27] Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 41: AAS 81 (1989), 470-472.
- [28] Cf. No. 32: AAS 80 (1988), 556.

[29] No. 43: AAS 87 (1995), 946.

[30] Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 196, Vatican City 2004, p. 216.

[31] Cf. Pontificale Romanum, *De ordinatione episcopi*, 43.

[32] Cf. can. 394; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 203.

[33] Cf. Nos. 193-198: pp. 212-219.

[34] *Ibid.*, 194: pp. 213-214.

[35] *Sermo* 52, 16: PL 38, 360.

[36] Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 3, 1-3: SCh 133, 256-258.

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