

Keep Your Camps Lit



**"Light and love are one and the same.
They are the primordial creative power
that moves the universe."**

Pope Benedict XVI



The Clash of Civilisations

A great deal has happened since fireworks and celebrations greeted the arrival of the year 2000 and expectations of a better, more peaceful world. Just over six years later it seems that the tone of the new century may have been set by the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11th 2001. A great modern city, protected by massive weapons and powerful armies proved frighteningly vulnerable to the actions of a small number of ruthless individuals.

Since then, there have been atrocities in Bali, Madrid and London, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and ongoing conflicts in Africa and the Middle East.

Our hopefulness at the dawn of the millennium was largely due to the fact that we had seen how suddenly the world can change for the better. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and of 'The Iron Curtain' would have seemed most unlikely right up to the moment it began to happen.

The years ahead will bring equally dramatic changes – these will certainly include major crises and challenges and huge dangers – critical energy shortages, conflicts about resources and even about water, pandemics and natural disasters, accelerating climate change, destruction of the environment, an end to the dominance of the West, growing dissatisfaction and alienation from institutions, an increasing sense of being rudderless and adrift.

Underlying many of our anxieties is the prospect of what has been called 'the clash of civilisations' or 'the clash of cultures'.

Pope John Paul pointed out that at the heart of every culture is our attitude "to the greatest mystery, the mystery of God": The Communist empire collapsed because it left no space for that mystery. Human beings cannot be understood "on the basis of economics alone".

"Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence... The true cause of the new developments was the spiritual void brought about by atheism, which deprived the younger generations of a sense of direction and in many cases led them, in the irrepressible search for personal identity and for the meaning of life, to rediscover the religious roots of their national cultures, and to rediscover the person of Christ himself...". ⁽¹⁾

How we live in our communities, the values and traditions we share, the priorities and goals that guide our personal and social lives, the kind of community we seek to create for ourselves cannot be divorced from our idea of the meaning of human life. Modern cultures are shaped by people's attitude to that question and to the mystery of God in a great variety of ways. Indeed the clash of civilisations is fundamentally about different understandings of the relationship between religious faith and social life.

In the West, there is a fear of Islamic societies in which religion and politics seem indistinguishable. In the Islamic world there is a fear of Western societies which seem to regard faith as irrelevant to political and social life. It is hard for us Europeans to understand that the secular nation state in our sense is not universally seen as an ideal. We should not underestimate the degree to which those two factors, the secularisation of politics and the rise of the nation state, have fuelled Islamic suspicion and hostility towards the West.

A society whose political language has little or no place for religious concepts appears as strange and even repellent not only to many in the Islamic world but in other places as well. They would not feel at home in a society based on the attitude identified by Pope John Paul:

"Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends" ⁽²⁾.

We saw different relationship between politics and religion in the US presidential election of 2003 which gave rise to another kind of incomprehension. Many people in Western Europe looked with some astonishment at an affluent, highly developed country "in which, according to the polls, moral issues - interpreted by some to mean 'Christian values' - were at the top of voters' concerns, outweighing the economy, terrorism, and the war in Iraq" ⁽³⁾. Politics in the US are in many ways entirely secular, yet religious motivation and commitment fit into political discourse in ways that raise eyebrows on this side of the Atlantic.

There are other parts of the world where religious belief is clearly at work, when, for instance, it fuels the protest against violations of human dignity, mass poverty and corruption in Latin America. In some Islamic states, like Egypt and Turkey, which seek to follow the secular path, the resistance was and is to a large extent religious.

Those are very broad generalisations, which could of course be questioned; they certainly could be nuanced. But they indicate that the often enunciated principle, that 'religion has no place in politics', is not a self-evident truth. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out,

Religion didn't die. It persists as humanity's oldest, noblest attempt to endow human life with meaning. Secularisation turned out to be the exception, not the rule ⁽⁴⁾.

The underlying question is not about Church and State considered as two 'institutions'. The most fundamental issue is whether religious faith (or other deep convictions about the meaning of life) should be seen as something private or as having a significant role to play in social and political life. If it is the latter, what kind of role should that be? Understanding this issue is crucial for the future of Europe and of the world. It is also crucial for understanding our own responsibilities as Christian citizens.

God is Love

So, what does our understanding of the nature and meaning of human life have to offer in the political arena? The goal of human life is not the health of the economy, nor success and affluence; these will always be fragile and can never be enough. Neither is it power and status – which are inevitably vulnerable to those who are more powerful or more ruthless. It is not about building a utopia – which could never be great enough to answer all human longings or to bring final and complete justice for every human being of every generation, living and dead ⁽⁵⁾. *There can be great value in the pursuit of these aims provided that they are not understood as, or do not in practice become, the goal of a person's life.*

Any human achievement is impermanent and every human life is destined for death. We are created for something greater than success or wealth or even the building of an ideal society. If we have lived our lives for these things, we will sooner or later hear the words: "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Lk 12:20)

Human life finds its fulfilment and meaning in giving oneself to others and ultimately to God. "Human beings... can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving" ⁽⁶⁾. For us followers of Christ, the context of this self-giving is that God has first loved us; God's love has been made visible in Jesus Christ: "In this the love of God has been made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4: 9,10).

Pope Benedict's first encyclical addresses the subject of Christian love. *Deus Caritas Est*, (God is Love) reflects on the fundamental truth on which the Christian life is built: "We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life" ⁽⁷⁾.

God's love for us is given freely: he has "no need of our praise", we can "add nothing to his greatness" ⁽⁸⁾. God's love is a forgiving love, restoring friendship to those who have failed to appreciate, even to those who have betrayed and rejected, the gift they have received. The father of the prodigal son remains a loving father no matter what his wandering son does.

God is the absolutely unchangeable source of all that exists; yet, the unique revelation of Biblical faith is that God is also "a lover with all the passion of a true love" ⁽⁹⁾. Because we have been loved by God "with a personal love" ⁽¹⁰⁾, self-giving is no mere emptying of ourselves leaving a void, but an opening up of our deepest being to receive the unlimited, utterly reliable love of God.

One of the most important lessons that we need to relearn in a secularised world is that these truths are not just about a part or a sphere or an aspect of our lives. They are about the meaning and the "fundamental decision" of our whole lives. There is no area of life outside this relationship of love; there is nothing in human life that does not find its ultimate meaning and purpose in the personal love of God for us.

On the day when Pope John Paul came to Limerick, he issued a challenge to us about how that fundamental decision should influence every part of our lives:

"Lay people today are called to a strong Christian commitment, to permeate society with the leaven of the Gospel, for Ireland is at a point of decision in her history. The Irish people have to choose today their way forward. Will it be the transformation of all strata of humanity into a new creation, or the way that many nations have gone, giving excessive importance to economic growth and material possessions, while neglecting the things of the spirit?"

- ★ The way of preferring economic growth and material possessions to the things of the spirit?
- ★ The way of substituting a new ethic of temporal enjoyment for the law of God?
- ★ The way of false freedom which is only slavery to decadence?
- ★ Will it be the way of subjugating the dignity of the human person to the totalitarian domination of the State?
- ★ The way of violent struggle between classes?
- ★ The way of extolling revolution over God?" ⁽¹¹⁾.

He reminded us that Jesus had asked his disciples what it would profit them if they gained the whole world, but forfeited their life? (Mt 16:26). The Pope then turned the question to us: "What would it profit Ireland to go the easy way of the world and suffer the loss of her own soul?"

The leaven of the Gospel is the central truth about God's love for us in Christ. The most profound question in relation to any aspect of our existence is how to live as people who have come to believe in that love, how to allow it to become the leaven of our individual and social lives. That divine love is also the light which darkness cannot overpower. As Pope Benedict said a couple of days before the encyclical was published: "Light and love are the same reality. They are the primordial creative power that moves the universe". And the wonder of the Gospel, he said, is that, "God, the infinite Light... has a human face and, we may add, a human heart" ⁽¹²⁾.

But how are we to permeate society with the leaven of that Good News, with the light of Christ, when many of our fellow citizens do not believe in Christ and many regard any influence of religious belief in political and economic life as an intrusion? What influence should my religious beliefs have on my responsibilities as a citizen? It is clear that I cannot, and should not, try to impose them on others; it is equally clear that I may not look on society as a sphere in which the love of God is irrelevant. If we fail to bring the leaven of the Gospel to our society, we will fail the challenge.

Communities and Institutions

In order to understand this challenge, it is important to reflect on the nature of civil society on the one hand and of religious faith on the other. "The two spheres are distinct, yet always interrelated" ⁽¹³⁾. Each 'side' needs to recognise that it is not the other; it needs the other and must not seek to act as if it were the other.

The State rightly recognises its obligation to try to create a more just society in which every citizen's dignity is respected. But, the tools of legal, political, social and economic policy at its disposal cannot enable it to provide everything that human wellbeing requires. In order that individuals and communities can live a fully human life, more is required than the State can ever create:

If, beyond legal rules, there is really no deeper feeling of respect for and service to others, then even equality before the law can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation and actual contempt" ⁽¹⁴⁾.

If the State does not recognise the limitations on its role, it will fail to recognise the importance of the things it cannot do:

"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" ⁽¹⁵⁾.

The State is an institution which serves the people of a particular nation in the essential task of bringing about a just society. Like every institution, people participate in it for particular defined purposes and have defined obligations towards it. Membership of an institution, however important, is not the whole of life. That is why one sometimes hears complaints about 'the nanny state' or 'big government' and concern about personal information becoming available to the institutions of the State without good reason, and concern about State intrusion into the lives of individuals and organisations. We are not the property of the State. There is more to us than our citizenship. We have other loyalties that are different and deeper. There are parts of our lives which ought not to be under the control of the State or even accessible to the State; otherwise it would become a tyranny.

Belonging to a community, one's family for instance, is a different kind of reality. It involves the whole of oneself. We relate not just in our role as citizens or as members of an institution. If a family is what it should be, people relate to one another as whole people, not just on a business basis or to cooperate on particular undertakings; 'heart speaks to heart'. A family requires a different kind of commitment, 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health'. It calls for the 'sincere self-giving' through which we grow as human beings and discover our true selves.

Sadly, there are situations where family life remains distant, anonymous, even violent and abusive. The pain of these situations is exacerbated by the fact that we know that this is a cruel distortion of what family life should be.

There are situations when citizenship may demand heroic self-sacrifice. In normal circumstances, however, while the organs of the State may require my taxes, my time, my compliance with laws, they cannot require the commitment of my whole self. The legislature may demand that I obey and respect the law, not that I approve of it. Patriotism demands that I recognise and respect the role of the democratically elected government, not that I agree with its policies nor that I refrain from seeking to have them changed and to have a different government elected. Because my inner thoughts and values are not the business of the State, it cannot create, or demand that citizens show, 'loving personal concern'.

That comes from somewhere else. Here we are at the heart of the question. It is by belonging to a community or communities, not by membership of an institution, not by being a citizen that I acquire the values and commitments which guide my life and which, among many other things, make me a good citizen:



"But it is precisely as a member of a community that I learn a moral language, a vision and its way of life. I become articulate by acquiring a set of meanings not of my own invention, but part of a common heritage. I become connected to others through bonds of loyalty that are covenantal rather than contractual. And I become connected too, to the community's past and future, so that I can understand my life as a chapter in a larger narrative. That is what Christians, Jews and others do when they grow up in a religious tradition, and what Aristotle believed education was: induction into a community"⁽¹⁶⁾.

One of the assumptions underlying the way western societies, including Ireland, have developed is that faith should be seen as a private matter, that religion should have nothing to do with politics. We assumed "that we can edit God out of the language and leave our social world unchanged... But that

optimism has now been shattered... Our loss of a shared morality has fragmented our social world and made even our most intimate relationships seem fragile and conditional" ⁽¹⁷⁾.

It is our communities, our traditions our moral vision, our beliefs that make us what we are. What we learn in these contexts drives and strengthens and deepens the commitment to justice and the concern for the common good without which the State could not function. At the same time it is not the role of a church, a faith community, or any other community of values, to attempt to be the State.

Catholic Social Doctrine

Members of religious traditions and communities, reflect on what it means to be a human being in society in the light of their faith. Their understanding of the meaning of life and the mystery of God influence the whole of their lives. Christians realise that the fundamental decision underlying every aspect of our lives is "We have come to believe in God's love".

In the Catholic Church the fruit of centuries of reflection on the social implications of that belief has developed into an organic system of teaching which is expressed in the great social encyclicals beginning with *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII in 1891, down to our own day and the social encyclicals of Pope John Paul II ⁽¹⁸⁾. This has become known as the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Deus Caritas Est is the latest in that long line. Pope Benedict's encyclical reinforces a point which is sometimes misunderstood. The social doctrine of the Church is not an ideology, not a political programme which the Church seeks to impose; it is theology:

"The Church's social doctrine is... the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church's tradition. Its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation

which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behaviour. It therefore belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly moral theology" ⁽¹⁹⁾.

The year 2004 saw the publication by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which gives "a concise but complete overview of the Church's social teaching" ⁽²⁰⁾.

The words 'teaching' or 'doctrine' might be misunderstood as implying that the Church claims authority over the workings of political society, teaching or instructing legislators about which particular policies are to be adopted. The Church "does not intervene in technical questions with her social doctrine, nor does she propose or establish models of social organisation" ⁽²¹⁾. On the contrary, the words 'teaching' and 'doctrine' indicate that the Church is seeking to do something quite different from the State's role.

"(Catholic social doctrine) 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...

It recognises 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...

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible" ⁽²²⁾.

Allowing the Light to Shine

The Church has the role of helping her members to see the issues clearly in the light of their fundamental decision: "We have come to believe in God's love." That truth is God's incarnate word, the light that darkness cannot overpower. The light enables us to see ourselves, one another and our society

as existing in a universe created by love. The role of the Church is to allow the light to shine.

"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" ⁽²³⁾.

Promoting 'openness of mind and will' means trying to help people overcome blind spots and shadows, brought about by selfishness, by the temptation to misuse power, by unduly favouring the interests of one's own group and so on. Issues of justice take on a clearer light for someone who knows that Christ will say to us in the name of the weakest, the neediest, the strangers, 'What you did, or failed to do, to one of these, you did, or failed to do to me'.

These issues take on a new clarity when the light of the Gospel shines because, in the teaching of Jesus, the concept of 'neighbour' has no limits:

"Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of 'neighbour' is now universalised, 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" ⁽²⁴⁾.

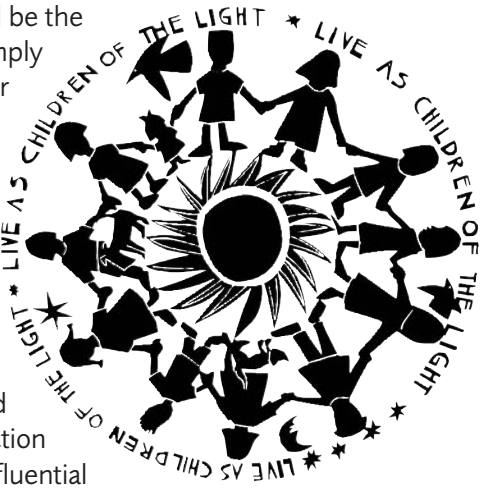
The task of educating her members to live as people who believe in God's love is carried out in many ways – in the family, "the primary vital cell of society" ⁽²⁵⁾, where children learn their first lessons of fairness, generosity and trustworthiness; in the faith, life and worship of a Christian community; in schools, where the community shares its wisdom, its values and its faith with a new generation; in the reflection of Catholics about the issues that face them; in preaching and in adult education; in the moral and social teaching of the Church. Moral education aims to deepen a vision, to foster a way of life founded on "deep amazement at human worth and dignity" ⁽²⁶⁾ in the light of Christ. "In the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God" ⁽²⁷⁾.

The most dangerous blind spot in our day is the assumption that there is no moral truth to be found. We risk confusing the respect due to the

conscientious views of others with the idea that every view is equally true. Heated discussions on radio and television and in pubs and homes amply demonstrate that this is easier said than done! It cannot make sense for each of us simply to live by his or her own standards, however sincerely held, because one person's behaviour has an impact on others. If I believe that your action violates my dignity and rights, the fact that you sincerely believe that you are right is of little consolation to me! The fact that someone is sincere does not mean that they have judged the situation correctly – as our experience of our own mistakes painfully shows us.

Tolerance means that I should regard each person's search for the truth as a sacred thing and that I should respect his or her convictions. It cannot mean that I am obliged to regard those convictions as correct, nor to accept that they are just as true as mine. If there were no objective truth to be found, what would be the point of moral dialogue? Why not simply conclude that there is no accounting for taste?

Pope John Paul described the view that no actions can be said to be wrong in themselves as an "overthrowing and downfall of moral values"⁽²⁸⁾. The existence of moral truths which make their demands equally on everybody is the very foundation of justice and indeed of democracy. Neither can function healthily unless the weakest and least influential person may demand to be treated by the wealthiest and most powerful only in ways that respect his or her human dignity and rights.



"When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone... Before the demands of morality, we are all absolutely equal"⁽²⁹⁾.

Every citizen brings a personal vision of human dignity to the discussion of justice in society. Christians bring a conviction that the concept 'neighbour'

includes everyone. Above all, Christians understand the whole of life, individual and social in the light of their 'fundamental decision': "We have come to believe in God's love" made visible in Jesus Christ.

It would be fundamentally illiberal, the direct opposite of tolerance, to demand that some citizens should leave their convictions behind when they enter the public forum. Indeed one might ask how far the alienation from politics and from the institutions of society generally may not simply be the other side of a mistaken "tolerance" which says, 'believe what you like, but don't mention it in public because it is a matter of total indifference to the rest of us'.

"We desire to possess the world and our own lives in an unlimited way. God is an obstacle to that. Either one makes of him only pious words or he is completely denied, barred from public life, so as to lose all significance. Tolerance which, as one might say, admits God as a private opinion but refuses God any place in the public domain, in the reality of the world, in our life, is not tolerance but hypocrisy. But wherever the human being makes himself the sole lord of the world and owner of himself, there can be no justice. Only individual will and power and interests can dominate" ⁽³⁰⁾.

A true tolerance would recognise the importance of deep convictions about the meaning of life and the mystery of God and would acknowledge the ways in which these can contribute to refining and clarifying the moral vision of those who hold them – and to enriching the outlook of those who do not. Furthermore, as Pope John Paul pointed out, "Those who acknowledge the relationship between ultimate truth and God himself will also acknowledge the right, as well as the duty, of non-believers to seek the truth which can lead them to discover the Mystery of God and humbly accept it" ⁽³¹⁾.

A similar alienation could occur in formal education if we were to accept the view that religious convictions have no place in schools in 'a pluralist, secular State'. Education, like politics, and like every aspect of human life, ultimately concerns the whole person, the meaning of life, the mystery of God. It is influenced by the deep convictions which motivate us and challenge us to broaden our horizons. To claim that these are irrelevant to education would be to deny that education is about the development of the whole person.

Christians believe that we are all called to be members of God's family and to treat one another as we would Christ himself: "Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself" ⁽³²⁾. How could one imagine that telling Christian citizens to leave aside that belief when they enter the political arena would increase their readiness to respect other members of the family of God?

To describe as 'tolerance' an attitude which would mean that one is permitted to have one's own beliefs provided one refrains from expressing them in public, or from allowing them to influence one's political stances, would turn language on its head. It would be difficult to see how such 'tolerance' would differ from intolerance! It would mean telling people that their understanding of human life and dignity has nothing of value to offer to a common vision of what human society should seek to foster:

... the value of tolerance is disingenuously invoked when a large number of citizens, Catholics among them, are asked not to base their contribution to society and political life – through legitimate means available to everybody in a democracy – on their particular understanding of the human person and the common good ⁽³³⁾.

As followers of Christ, we are obliged to fulfil the demands of justice in our personal lives. We are also obliged to try to ensure that the society to which we belong respects those demands. The words of Pope John Paul in Limerick said just that. As he said on another occasion, we do not live two parallel lives, 'spiritual' and 'secular'; every particular responsibility, in the family, at work, in education, social and public life, in culture, is an occasion "for a continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity" ⁽³⁴⁾. As Christian citizens, we should never lose sight of the fact that our obligations towards others go far beyond their rights in justice:

"The experience of the past and of our own time demonstrates that justice alone is not enough, that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself, if that deeper power which is love, is not allowed to shape human life in its various dimensions" ⁽³⁵⁾.

Through Dialogue

The mechanism for creating structures of justice through laws, economic policies and social provisions is not the Church, but the State. When Christians wish to influence this process they have to enter into political discussion. They must do so as citizens, 'through legitimate means available to everybody in a democracy'.

There would be no point in conducting a political discussion as if it were a theological one. The arguments deployed in public debate have to be framed in the common language of citizenship. The vision that can enlighten the Christian's mind in seeking to improve the structures and values of society is one thing, the reasoning by which he or she seeks to persuade others of the importance of that vision, of how it enhances and enriches our understanding of our own dignity, of how it can help to make society more respectful and supportive of human dignity, is another.

The building of justice through laws and social structures has to be pursued through reasoned discussion, not about theological positions but about what is best for society. That is the basis on which everybody, believer and unbeliever, ought to discuss political issues.

The idea of the common good stems from the dignity, unity, and equality of all human beings in their fundamental humanity. The flourishing of that dignity can only be made possible if we work together – hence the need for a common language about the good of the whole community and of each individual⁽³⁶⁾. The common good would be betrayed if one set out to achieve it by denying the dignity of any individual. The question arises, however, when we try to speak in a common language about the common good, can we be sure that there is a real agreement between people of different traditions, religious and non-religious, about their understanding of human dignity and the common good? How can we know that we are talking about the same thing? There are two possible responses to that question. The first and more hopeful one is that, since we are speaking out of our understanding of the truth about ourselves which lies deep within us, we can hope that what we say will find an echo in the hearts of other human beings. One indication that

this hope is not vain is the experience, nearly sixty decades ago, of the drawing up of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948). Although those who drew up the document came from many different religious, cultural and philosophical backgrounds, and although they would not have been able to agree on the reasons underlying the rights they formulated, they achieved considerable agreement and made "an important step on the path towards the juridical-political organisation of the world community"⁽³⁷⁾.

There is, however, a less hopeful, answer, suggested by Pope John Paul's phrase about the "overthrowing and downfall of moral values". Perhaps for the first time in history, there is a frame of mind that doubts whether there is an objective truth about human dignity. If there is not, our various attempts to express who we are can lead only to an unlimited number of equally valid and perhaps incompatible opinions. These would no longer be seen as more or less full expressions of the same truth. There would be no solid basis on which to build, no objective values and principles according to which individuals and society should live.

This second, more pessimistic, response raises the question as to whether Western civilisation might not be germinating the seeds of its own destruction. Democracy is a great human achievement, but we are in danger of leaving ourselves with no language in which we can speak together about the foundations on which it rests. Relativism, the idea that all moral views, however mutually contradictory, could be equally true cannot provide a foundation⁽³⁸⁾. In fact, it is one of the greatest threats to modern democracies⁽³⁹⁾. We have to be aware of the realities that point to the second answer while continuing to act on the first. We have to speak our vision of human dignity and its consequences in a language that can be understood by others, believing that the truth has its own harmony with the human mind and heart. There are many signs, not least the UN Declaration, that we can go further along that road than might at first seem likely. There is hope because, "religions and cultures today show openness to dialogue and sense the urgent need to join forces in promoting justice, fraternity, peace and the growth of the human person"⁽⁴⁰⁾. The Gospel message is not irrational. On the contrary, it reveals the full truth about humanity and human destiny. The truth of Christ does not prompt us to do things that authentic reason would regard as wrong. Rather it places our understanding in a new context which can

enlarge and deepen our vision of human dignity. That vision can speak to those who do not share its Gospel roots:

The light of the Gospel that the Church's social doctrine shines on society illuminates all men and women, and every conscience and mind is in a position to grasp the human depths of meaning and values expressed in it and the potential of humanity and humanisation contained in its norms of action. It is to all people... that the Church's social doctrine is addressed⁽⁴¹⁾.

The Root of All Evil

A recent television series in Britain set out to show that religion is 'the root of all evil'. It quoted an American physicist as saying, "For good people to do evil things it takes religion". It would be unrealistic not to recognise that deep convictions, even religious convictions, may narrow rather than broaden our

horizons. We have seen many conflicts, not least in our own country, with a religious dimension – even if the conflict is not primarily about religious issues.



In his first message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict spoke of two dangers: Nihilism⁽⁴²⁾: The word implies a belief that nothing is worthwhile and that there is no objective truth; and Fundamentalism:

which has come to mean a very literal interpretation of religious or political traditions. Fanatical fundamentalism is associated with attempts to impose one's own convictions on others.

What they have in common, the Holy Father says, is an erroneous relationship to truth:

"... the nihilist denies the very existence of truth, while the fundamentalist claims to be able to impose it by force. Despite their different origins and cultural backgrounds, both show a dangerous contempt for human beings and human life, and ultimately for God himself. Indeed, this shared tragic outcome results from a distortion of the full truth about God: nihilism denies God's existence and his provident presence in history, while fanatical fundamentalist disfigures his loving countenance, replacing him with idols made in its own image" ⁽⁴³⁾.

Both the belief that there is no objective truth and the idea others should be forced to accept my convictions are destructive of society. Neither of them is an expression of genuine religion; both are denials of religion, showing contempt for human beings and for God. But in a world which thinks so rarely of 'God's provident presence', these are ever present temptations, nihilism can grow from the idea that all truth is relative – and, therefore, the search for truth and for God can find nothing -- and fundamentalism from fear and insecurity – which can be the result of a lack of trust in God's providence.

Filling the Void

The Church plays her role in the life of society through rational argument, not through coercion. For three decades the Irish bishops have made it abundantly clear that the fact that something is Church teaching is not in itself a reason for putting it into the criminal law; neither is it a reason not to do so. Such questions must be argued on the basis of the common good of individuals and of society. As the bishops' delegation to the All Ireland Forum in 1984 put it, the Catholic Church in Ireland "seeks no power except the power of the Gospel which it preaches and the consciences and convictions of those who freely accept that teaching".

An attempt to impose what one may, perhaps rightly, see to be desirable would run the risk of seriously misunderstanding who God is:

"It is not power, but love that redeems us! This is God's sign: he himself is love. How often we wish that God would show himself stronger, that he would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way, they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man" ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

But there is another dimension:

"(The Church) 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" ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

If there is one thing above all that our society needs it is 'spiritual energy'. Some months ago, Roy Hattersley wrote an article in which he asked himself why, when a disaster like Hurricane Katrina strikes, the people who rush to help are overwhelmingly believers: "Notable by their absence", he said, "are teams from rationalist societies, free thinkers clubs and atheists' associations..." He concludes, "Men and women who, like me, cannot accept the miracles and mysteries do not go out with the Salvation Army at night" ⁽⁴⁶⁾. For people to do good it often takes religion!

That is not to say that those who have no religious belief do not include many dedicated and committed people, but it points to the reality that it is religious faith that prompts many people to behave with practical concern and heroic generosity.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks sums up the dilemma that Western society is facing and which this reflection has been considering:

"For four centuries the West proceeded on the assumption that science, politics and economics would take the place once held by the Church. The problem of religion would be solved by depriving

it of power. What happens, though, when religion returns in all its power precisely because it answers questions to which science, politics and economics offer no reply? The great faiths provide meaning and purpose for their adherents. The question is: can they make space for those who are not its adherents, who sing a different song, hear different music, tell a different story? On that question, the fate of the twenty-first century may turn" ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

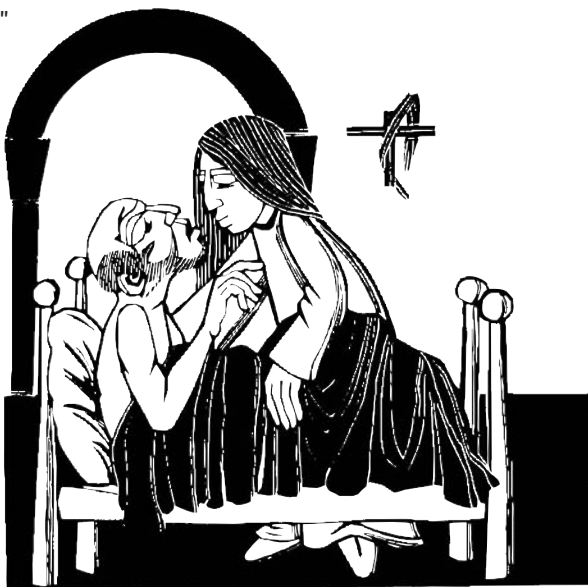
Like much of the western world we in Ireland are sorely in need of a vision and purpose big enough to unite us. The fear-filled vision of 'the war on terror' will not do it; the attempt to maintain our identity by distrusting and excluding others offers no ultimate goal. Even the far-off prospect of building a Utopia for 'remote posterity' will not inspire us sufficiently:

This is all too finite, we say... No need of agonizing ourselves or making others agonize about these good creatures just at present. When, however, we believe that a God is there and that he is one of the claimants, the infinite perspective opens out"

⁽⁴⁸⁾

The spiritual energy that comes when the infinite perspective opens out is not our own:

"The Spirit is... 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" ⁽⁴⁹⁾.



Our belief that the God who created us loves us with 'all the passion of a true love' prompts us to offer the fruits of that faith to others, not by coercion but by a dialogue of love.

The tone, the culture of any society is made up of the often unspoken assumptions and attitudes of the individuals and groups within it. These assumptions are not unchanging and unchangeable; people who have different assumptions can quite dramatically change the underlying culture. That indeed is what has happened in this country in recent decades. Unspoken assumptions can be taken both by those who make them and by those who see them in action to be self-evident and obvious. In a world which regards it as normal to live as though large parts of human life can be divorced from the fundamental questions of meaning, the most important need is not for more convincing arguments. It is for individuals and communities whose lives are inspired by something deeper, by a vision that gives meaning to the whole of life. To put it bluntly, we will bring the light of love to society, not in the first place by arguments but by loving all the members of the human family without exception, even, and especially, those who seem least open to the light.

The Civilisation of Love

That last phrase may jar on us. That may be because we have lost sight of the deepest meaning of our relationship with our fellow citizens: it is not simply a matter of justice, commerce and so on. Everyone whose life we touch – our neighbour in the Gospel sense – is to be loved as we love ourselves.

The laws and institutions of the State cannot create real love and care for each other among the citizens. Inner thoughts and attitudes are no business of the State. But we who are Christians are called to express and to live our understanding of God's love for us in our involvement in society. This means a love based not just on rights and duties but on,

"... selflessness, detachment from material goods, giving freely, and inner acceptance of the needs of others...

Social life becomes more human the more it is characterised by efforts to bring about a more mature awareness of the ideal towards which it should be oriented, which is the 'civilisation of love'...

The human person... does not find complete self-fulfilment until he moves beyond the mentality of needs and enters into that of gratuitousness and gift, which fully corresponds to his essence and community vocation"⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Our service to all of our society, and to the State of which we are citizens, is to proclaim in our words and actions that we there is more to us than our citizenship, important though that is. We are people who have come to believe in God's love for all humanity, to believe that God is love.

This does not make us less committed citizens. On the contrary, it gives us reasons to do what is good with a new depth and commitment, a new generosity and readiness to love all our brothers and sisters as Christ has loved us, and a challenging new breadth of vision and limitless hope.

The call to let that light shine from us is more urgent now that it was when Pope John Paul issued it to us in 1979. But we wonder how we can possibly set about such a huge task. On the one hand we can see all too clearly how the light of faith seems to shine less brightly in our country than it did. On the other hand we can see the benefits of a greater tolerance and a more inclusive society. We feel ourselves torn between the feeling that something priceless is in the process of being lost and the feeling that in our increasingly diverse society it would not be appropriate to speak about our faith and its implications in the way we did in the past.

It is essential, therefore, that we try to get the balance right. The Church and individual members do not approach political questions with any coercive power or indeed with any detailed answers. Rather the Church "goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family"⁽⁵¹⁾.

This is an obligation on every follower of Christ – to awaken the soul of human society. There is no point in lamenting the fact that life seems lonely or pointless or unsatisfying for so many people, that there is something superficial and empty about contemporary life, if we who have come to believe in God's love do not live that faith and share it and if large parts of our lives are, in practice, lived as though God did not exist.

Everything we do, every decision we make, every policy we support should express "a love nourished by an encounter with Christ"⁽⁵²⁾. We should try to see Christ in every person we meet, in everybody affected by our actions or attitudes. This means giving the other person not just his or her due, but ourselves:

"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 by very self. I must be personally present in my gift... The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be"⁽⁵³⁾.

This is where our participation in social life begins; this is what gives it spiritual energy. This is what demands of us that we approach our social obligations seeking to love our neighbour as Jesus has loved us (John 15:12). That is why we must not be misled by the claim that religion should have nothing to do with politics.

Neither an attempt to build a society without God nor an attempt to give to every detail of social life the absoluteness that belongs only to God can be the way forward. What we can and must do is to take the starting point seriously: "We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life".

For each of us, when we are involved in political or social or charitable action, when we are involved in the life of our parish or diocese, when we are in our families or work or leisure, we need to ask ourselves 'is this is the fundamental decision which is guiding everything I do?' That means recalling the importance of prayer, which is the foundation for everything in the life of the Church. It is also the foundation for growing in understanding of the light of the Gospel. It is the foundation for our sharing that light with all of society.

Prayer leads us ever more deeply into what Pope John Paul called "a spirituality of communion", which enables us to see the light of the Trinity dwelling in us and in our brothers and sisters and to see them in the unity of

Christ's Body as 'those who are part of me'. Among other things, the spirituality of communion means

"... knowing how to 'make room' for our brothers and sisters, bearing 'each others burdens' and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, 'masks' of communion rather than its means of expression and growth"⁽⁵⁴⁾.

In his homily on the day that his pontificate was solemnly inaugurated, Pope Benedict, as he so often does, offered a striking image of our need for the new life of the Gospel:

"... it is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance."

Each Christian is called to respond to that challenge of leading people to the place where God gives life in abundance. It is no easy task, but we live in a desert which needs new life more urgently than ever. It is a large task, but Pope John Paul introduced his call to us in Limerick with the assertion that there is no such thing as an ordinary lay person:

"Yes, the laity are "a chosen race, a holy priesthood", also called to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world". It is their specific vocation and mission to express the Gospel in their lives

and thereby to insert the Gospel as a leaven into the reality of the world in which they live and work. The great forces which shape the world — politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture, education, industry and work — are precisely the areas where lay people are especially competent to exercise their mission. If these forces are guided by people who are true disciples of Christ, and who are, at the same time, fully competent in the relevant secular knowledge and skill, then indeed will the world be transformed from within by Christ's redeeming power.

The redeeming power is love. That is what we are to bring to the world that needs it more than ever. Two days before his encyclical was published, Pope Benedict summed up his reason for writing:

"Faith is something very concrete: it is the criterion that determines our lifestyle. In an epoch where hostility and greed have become superpowers, an epoch where we watch religion being abused to the point of deifying hatred, neutral rationality alone cannot protect us. We need the living God, who loved us even to death"⁽⁵⁵⁾.

Keep Your Camps Lit

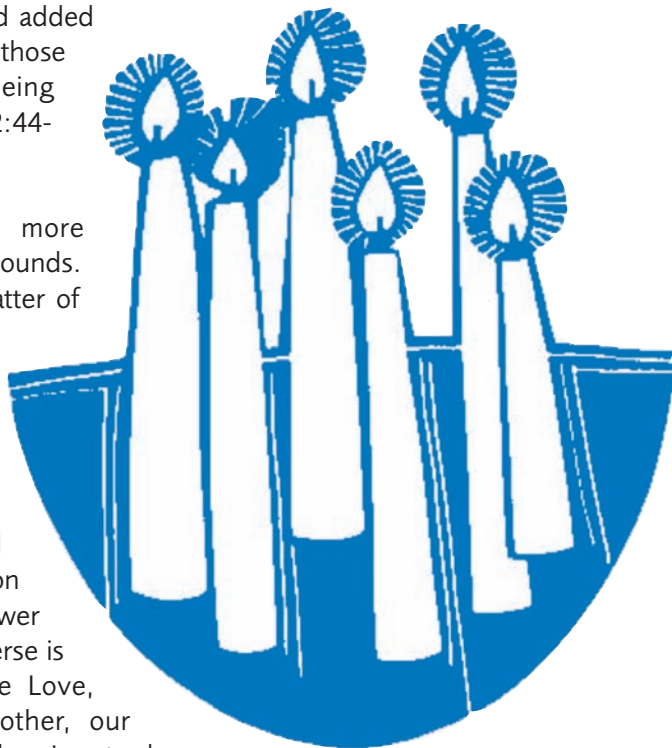
Faith 'is the criterion that determines our lifestyle'. This points to something that lies deeper than the caricatures and exaggerations that have often marked the way religion has sought to influence society and have also often marked the way in which this was portrayed.

The most profound influence of faith on society is in the way believers live both as individuals and as a community. The life of the Christian is meant to make the light visible, to show the world something of the love which moves the universe. This was how the Good News was shared from the beginning. It was not just preached; even more importantly, it was lived:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the

goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

This is even more demanding than it sounds. It is not simply a matter of carrying out particular duties, avoiding immoral behaviour and saying our prayers. It is about understanding and living the truth that, on the one hand, the power that moves the universe is personal, passionate Love, and that, on the other, our whole being is a longing to be embraced and transformed by that unlimited Love.



Pope John Paul did not minimise the challenge:

"It would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity... It would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life"⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Faith, the acceptance of God who is love, is not one among the many things that we do; it gives a meaning to our lives that is large enough to face our uncertainty, our fear and our mortality.

In a world so full of activity and pressure, in which we constantly move from task to task, from place to place, from one priority to another priority, from one

attention grabbing stimulus to another, our lives can become fragmented and incoherent. We find it difficult to recognise any overriding centre of our lives, yet we hunger for a meaning that would make sense of it all.

The love of God is that centre. It requires not just some of our time or energy or attention but our whole selves: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength" (Dt 6:5). This, Jesus said, is the greatest and the first commandment (Mt 22:38). And the love we show for each other must be like the love of God made visible in Jesus (Jn 13:34, 15:12; Rom 8:39), whose body was given up for us and whose blood was shed for us.

We shrink from taking up the cross to follow him; we fear sacrifice and suffering. The truth is that they open us to a love that is too big for our narrow and limited perspectives. They open us to a love that is greater than any pain or loss. They open us to the warmth and light of trust in God who is love. They teach us that our goal is greater than anything that we can possess or experience on earth.

Faced with the prospect of loss, humiliation and disappointment, the optimist may speak 'encouraging' words to us: 'Cheer up; it may never happen!' The words of Christian hope, by contrast are not addressed to us but to God who is ever-reliable love: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me" (Ps 23:4). Hope is not an unfounded confidence that our fears will not be realised but a statement of trust in God whose transforming love is with us even when what happens is worse than we had ever imagined.

Here is the first and most important contribution that we followers of Christ have to make to our societies – to be people who live that hope. The truth of Christ is the only thing that can satisfy our restlessness. This is what Pope John Paul called our most valuable gift:

"The most valuable gift that the Church can offer to the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith"⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The influence of faith on politics and society is not one of power and coercion; it is not a matter of making demands from on high. It is about individuals and communities that live in the light and warmth of God's love. Their presence in the world points to something beyond distorted priorities. Efficiency and productivity and affluence are not the goal of human life; they are instruments, sometimes very important instruments in helping to make life more human and to foster human dignity. If they are treated as if they were the goal and meaning of life they disguise and damage and undermine what is most human. They enslave us to the pursuit of what can never satisfy the hunger of the human heart.

In many ways our society has enslaved itself in a comfortable but limiting narrowness. A symptom of that is that, as Pope John Paul pointed out, we are "often unable to be silent for fear of meeting (ourselves), for fear of feeling the emptiness that asks itself about meaning"⁽⁵⁸⁾.

The light and warmth of God's love enable us to look at the emptiness, inadequacy and coldness of lesser goals and desires that could never fully satisfy us. This is one of the central elements in Pope Benedict's encyclical. Our desires and ambitions need to be purified and deepened to become self-giving love.

The Gospel is a Leaven

The challenge issued by Pope John Paul in Limerick was that Christians should "permeate society with the leaven of the Gospel, for Ireland is at a point of decision in her history". The Gospel is a leaven which spreads itself when the lives of individuals and communities respond to and manifest and are transformed by the love that moves the universe.

The first step in this process is that we ourselves must contemplate that love. We may be frightened by words like 'contemplation' and believe that they are not for us. The truth is that a contemplative outlook is required if we are to live and share the good news that is God's gift and God's invitation. It is an outlook that,

"arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a 'wonder' (cf. Ps 139:14)... the outlook of those who



see life
in its
deeper
meaning... the
outlook of those
who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead
accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the
Creator and seeing in every person the Creator's living image"⁽⁵⁹⁾.

Unconditional taking up of the cross to follow Christ, loving his Father without limit even to death on the cross as he did, loving one another as he loves us – who can tell what these may ask of us? We do not follow him on our own; God is not making an unreasonable imposition; we undertake this selfless following as a community of believers who "have come to believe in God's love".

If there were many overlapping communities which really, wholeheartedly lived out the fundamental decision of the Christian life, "We have come to believe in God's love", there would be an immense enrichment of our culture, of our political, social, economic life and of our society as a whole. If we lack such communities, there is no point in wondering why there seems to be emptiness, apathy, a lack of spiritual energy around us. Perhaps it is first of all within us! There can be no such thing as a passive Christian. To imagine that bringing the Good News to areas of one's life – family, educational, social, political, economic, cultural, communications, recreational and so on – is the responsibility of somebody else, is to be part of the problem.

There is much in the unspoken assumptions underlying our culture that is strongly hostile to any such deepening of our life or our vision; there is much that demonstrates the fear of meeting ourselves and of feeling the emptiness. There is a readiness to criticise individuals and institutions – sometimes fairly, sometimes cruelly; but where are we to find the vision and hope that will give a soul to our society, that will rebuild broken morale and give a sense of direction to those who search for meaning? This will not come from argument or political manoeuvring; it will come through the lives of people who have vision and hope at the core of their lives and who are a kind of leaven in society.

They are a leaven not with any sense of superiority, because the light of faith reveals to them the shadows and shortcomings, the half-heartedness and hesitancy first of all in their own response to the love which moves the universe.

The vision of faith will not result in a political programme or economic policies, although on occasion it may recognise with clarity and urgency that some brothers or sisters are being treated in a way that does not reflect their dignity. But when it comes to specific proposals and concrete responses, the same faith will prompt different conclusions and priorities from different people. One cannot deduce from the Good News what precise proportion of tax revenue should go to education, health, and overseas development aid.

What our faith offers to the world is not an ideology or a programme but an understanding of the immense dignity and worth of each human being.

On the day of the solemn inauguration of his pontificate, Pope Benedict reflected on his mission as a shepherd and fisherman. His words apply in a way to all of us, and in particular to our role as Christians in society:

"...the purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more

beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him."

If we can offer to our fellow citizens a glimpse of that vision, of the dignity it gives them and of the challenge it poses for our life in society, we will have performed the first and most important service that people of faith can do; we will have served "as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family." ⁽⁶⁰⁾

To be a Christian means knowing that the light and love that move the universe have a human face – the face of Christ. Living that faith ever more fully will enrich everything we do, including our approach to politics, to social issues, to welcoming the new Irish, to trying to ensure that every person is



respected, to our attitude to development aid and to the environment. It will also offer to others a living proof that there is a hope great enough to satisfy every human longing, there is one human family to which we all belong and a Father who is love itself. Our role is not to impose that vision on others but to live it ourselves so that they can see the light that shines through us and give glory to our Father in heaven (Mt 5:16). Our task is summed up in the theme chosen by the Shrine at Lourdes for this year's pilgrimages: Keep your lamps lit! (Cf. Luke 12:35)

Footnotes

1. JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus* [CA] 24.
2. CA, 26.
3. SACKS, J., in *The Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 2004, cf. also *The Persistence of Faith*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1991.
4. SACKS, art. cit.
5. Cf. CA, 41, and CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Human Freedom and Liberation*, 60.
6. VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
7. BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* [DCE], 1.
8. *Preface of Weekdays IV*.
9. DCE, 10.
10. DCE, 9.
11. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily in Limerick*, 1 October 1979 (my formatting).
12. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Cor Unum*, 23 January 2006.
13. DCE, 28.
14. PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 23.
15. CDE, 28.
16. *The Persistence of Faith*, p. 45.
17. *The Persistence of Faith*, pp. 27, 28.
18. *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991).
19. JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41.
20. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [CSDC], *Veritas* 2005, p. xxvi.
21. CSDC, 68.
22. DCE, 28a.
23. DCE, 28a.
24. DCE, 15.
25. VATICAN II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.
26. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.
27. DCE, 15.
28. JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 18.
29. JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 96.
30. BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops*, 2 October 2005.
31. *Message for the World Day of Peace 1991*, II.
32. DCE, 14.
33. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (2002), 2.

34. JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, 59.
35. JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 12
36. Cf. CSDC, 164, *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.
37. JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 144
38. Cf. PERA, M., and RATZINGER J., *Senza Radici*, Mondadori 2004, p. 26 et passim.
39. CSDC, 407.
40. CSDC, 12.
41. CSDC, 84.
42. The name comes from a nineteenth century Russian movement which sought to destroy society by terrorism.
43. BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace 2006*.
44. BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the solemn inauguration of his pontificate*, 24 April 2005.
45. CDE, 28a.
46. HATTERSLEY, R., in *The Guardian*, 12 September 2005.
47. SACKS, J., *The Dignity of Difference*, Continuum 2002, p. 43.
48. JAMES, W., 'Moral Philosopher and Moral Life' [1891] in *Essays on Faith and Morals*, Meridian 1962, p. 212.
49. DCE, 19.
50. CSDC, 390, 391.
51. VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 40.
52. CDE, 34.
53. CDE, 34, 35.
54. JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.
55. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Cor Unum*.
56. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31, 34.
57. *Cetechesi Tradendae*, 61.
58. JOHN PAUL II, *Oriente Lumen*, 16.
59. *Evangelium Vitae*, 83
60. *Gaudium et Spes*, 40



Lord That I May See

**Lord that I may see in your face
the love that moves the universe,
the plan of God hidden for all ages
and now revealed in you,
God's creative Word made flesh.**

**Lord that I may see your face
in every face,
in every situation,
in every possibility that opens up,
in every suffering and disappointment,
in the creation that is your gift.**

**Lord that I may see
that, wherever I am,
you are always close;
nowhere is distant from you;
when I fail to recognise your presence
I lose sight of the meaning of my own life;
I go away from you,
forgetting that you have the words of eternal life.**

**Lord that I may see
that you are the light of God
which darkness cannot overcome,
and which you have revealed
in the love greater than which no one has.
May your light enable me to see
that the deepest meaning of every decision,
every responsibility,
every facet of personal and social life
is to welcome your love for me
and for the whole human family.**

**Lord that I may see
the hope and the promise that shines from you.
May others recognise in me and in all the followers of Christ
the truth which sets us free from the emptiness we fear
and invites us to the eternal light and love of your Father.**



As often as you did it to one of these...

(Statue outside the Hospital of the Holy Spirit, Rome)