

THE POPE

Social Justice Starts with Change of Heart

Following is excerpted from an address given by Pope John Paul II earlier this month in Barcelona, Spain.

What should our offering to Christ consist of?

I will say at once that the first thing that the pope and the church expect of you is that you adopt truly Christian attitudes toward your own existence, toward the church herself, toward present human problems.



Your lives as human beings already have unique greatness and dignity in them. They require a proper evaluation to live your lives in coherent respect for the demands of truth, honesty and correct use of the magnificent divine gift of freedom in all its dimensions.

But this splendid reality may not be enclosed in those horizons alone, even though it may not do without them. It has to open up to the novelty which Christ came to bring to the world by teaching every man that he is God's child, redeemed by the blood of the same Christ, co-heir with him, and destined for a transcendent goal.

To deprive man of this perspective, which raises him to the highest level he can reach, would mean the greatest of mutilations upon him, for this perspective offers him the most suitable framework for deploying his best energies and enthusiasm.

As I wrote in the encyclical "Redemptor Hominis," this union of Christ with man is in itself a mystery. From the mystery is born the "new man," called to become a partaker of God's life and newly created in Christ for the fullness of grace and truth. Christ's union with man is power and the source of power, as St. John said so incisively in the prologue to his Gospel. God gave them the knowledge of the value of one's own existence, the foundation of our identity as Christians. This has to give rise to a consistent practical attitude of esteem for all that is human, an attitude which is good and effectively informed by faith.

The relation which the Christian establishes with the church is a very important thing for him. It is a relationship that may range from a polemical rejection to partial acceptance, from systematic criticism to mature and responsible fidelity.

In order to avoid confusion and a false perspective, the first attitude required is to think of the church as she truly is: as a society of a spiritual type with spiritual ends, incarnated in the men and women of each age, without any desire at all to enter into competition with the civil powers and concern herself with merely material or political affairs, which she joyfully acknowledges are not her competence; without, however, renouncing her mission, which is the mandate received from Christ, to form the consciences of her faithful in the faith so that, under their dual role as citizens and faithful, they may contribute to the good in all spheres of life in accord with their own convictions and with due respect for those of others.

The church was founded by Christ on Peter and the apostles, and its mission is continued today in their successors. It is the universal sacrament of salvation, the sign and instrument of Christ's grace in which we are reborn to new life. It is so through its visible figure, which reminds men and women of the divine presence and action. It is so through the preaching of God's word and the administration of the sacraments, founts of salvation. It is so through the life of its faithful, who are called to contribute to spreading the Gospel message, each according to his or her circumstances, and to making Christ present in all social environments.

A very concrete attitude derives from this for the Christian. The church was established by Christ, and we may not claim to remake it according to our personal tastes. Through the will of its founder it has a guide, formed through the successor of Peter and the apostles. This implies,

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through fidelity to Christ, fidelity to the magisterium of the church.

The church is a mother, in whom we are reborn to new life in God. A mother should be loved. The church is holy in her founder, means and doctrine, but she is formed of sinful people. A positive contribution to bettering her must be made, to help her as well toward ever-renewed fidelity — something that is not attained through corrosive criticisms.

Every day the church offers the word of salvation and the sacraments instituted by Christ and does not depend on criteria of numbers and fashions. This obliges us to have respect for the hierarchy's voice, which is the immediate criterion and guide for faith. The church is formed of us all, the people of God. This imposes a responsible collaboration on the part of every Christian or group, on their powers, on their capacity for lived experiences but always in loyal obedience to the lawful pastors. The church loves men and women in their wholeness. Nothing of what is true in the human is indifferent to her. But in her struggle to elevate mankind she does not forget that her essential mission is to win for them salvation.

In the face of the problems of the present world in which he lives immersed the Christian can do no less than adopt an attitude reflecting the concept that he has of himself, in the light of his relationship with the church.

Conscious of his duty "to give a more human meaning to man and his history," the Christian must stand in the front line as a witness to truth, honesty and justice. This is the first consequence of the humanizing value of the faith and its creative dynamism.

Being well rooted in her faith, and through clear and valiant evangelical conviction, the church will not hesitate to assume her share of responsibility "to restore the order of temporal realities in Christ." Christians will never be able to forget that they have to be "the ferment and soul of society," and that in temporal tasks "by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one."

The child of the church has to live the conviction that he or she has to be a Christian of fidelity to Christ in order to be Christian in a consistent love for man, in defense of his rights, in a commitment to justice, in solidarity with those that seek the truth and the elevation of man.

These attitudes entail a profound commitment and a great capacity for effort and holiness.

The need opens before the Christian's eyes to change so many things that are inadequate or unjust, that call for transformation from within and without.

But there is a superficial way of thinking into which one may fall. It is that of wishing to change society by changing external structures only, or seeking only the satisfaction of man's material needs. But it is necessary to begin by changing oneself, to renew oneself morally, to transform oneself from inside, imitating Christ by destroying the roots of egoism and sin which are nesting in every heart. Once transformed such persons collaborate effectively in transforming society.

In order to live in this Christian attitude, the child of the

church who feels his or her own weakness and sinfulness needs constant commitment to conversion and return to the founts of idealism which inspire his or her conduct. He or she needs a constant return to conscience and Christ.

The Christian has to find the power and dynamism in his faith to correct and confirm himself in the good every day, without abandoning himself to that resigned passivity which insinuates itself into so many spirits.

A commitment to conversion has to be personal and also communitarian, capable of always orienting a person toward greater fidelity to his own Christian condition and overcoming faults and errors of the past by aiming at higher goals without letting himself be paralyzed by such past faults and errors, in useless immobilism or guilt feelings.

Unfortunately, faults and sin nestle in every man, in every human sector or organism made up of men and women, in the church and outside of her.

But God helps us renew ourselves constantly in his grace and love. The revealed word, Christ's example, the grace of the sacraments are our means of getting beyond ourselves through conversion.

These Christian attitudes require concrete criteria and guides to orient them in a sure manner, avoiding possible deviations. Do you want a sure, concrete, systematic criterion to guide you at the present moment? Follow the voice of the magisterium and be true to the council of our time: Vatican II.

Without reticence, fear or resistance on the one hand, but without arbitrary interpretation or confusion of objective teaching with your own ideas on the other, find the way of the necessary unity desired by Christ.

So, beloved brothers and sisters, live and infuse the wisdom of the faith of Christ into temporal realities, knowing that this faith does not destroy anything that is authentically human, but reinforces it, purifies it, elevates it.

Demonstrate this spirit in the attention you give to crucial problems: in the family environment, living and defending the indissolubility of marriage and its other values, promoting respect for every life from the moment of conception on; in the world of culture, education, and instruction by choosing schooling for your children which presents them with the bread of eternal life.

Be strong and generous when it is a question of helping to do away with injustice and social and economic discrimination, or when it is the time to take part in the positive task of increasing and properly distributing goods. Make efforts to see that laws and customs do not turn their backs on the transcendent sense of man and the moral aspects of life.

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Fr. Louis J. Hohman The Open Window

Mortal Sin And Mass Whatever happened to that stuff about coming to Mass late being a mortal sin if you arrived after the beginning of the Offertory, and only a venial sin if you arrived before that? Considering the number of people who come quite late to our Church it seems that many are still living by that particular rule. The rule you refer to is an absolutely marvelous example of the legalism which we have been trying so very hard to overcome in the last decade. To make such a radical distinction between the Liturgy of the

Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist by giving the latter a substantially greater importance than the former is simply theologically out of order. Perhaps the best analogy is the analogy of going to a dinner party at someone's home. If we decided without any sufficient reason that we're going to arrive immediately before the time when we know dinner is served and skip all of the social amenities which are an integral part of the relationship we are obviously insulting our host and hostess. In the area of social obligations and manners I don't think anyone would question the wrongness of coming late in that fashion, even though one would be coming for an important part of the celebration. Today we look at the Liturgy of the Word as a life-giving contact with God. It is really coming into the presence of God even though different from the real presence of the Eucharist. If love is the motive and desire for contact with the saving power of Jesus our goal, then how can we attach great importance to one form of contact and relative insignificance to the other form?