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THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

HOMILY BLESSING OF ST THOMAS MORE WINDOW

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY – AUGUST 1993

DELIVERED BY FR. BRIAN BYRON D.D.

Early in the morning of 6th July 1535 Thomas More's "singular friend", one Thomas Pope, came to his cell in the Tower of London to tell him that he was to be beheaded that morning at nine o'clock. He also brought the message that it was the King's wish that "at your execution you should not use many words". A similar suggestion has been made of me today, fortunately not under the same circumstances.

We commemorate today, not only St Thomas More, but another fine scholar whose life was prematurely ended by human violence: Val Nagle, a resident of this college from 1931 to 1936 who was killed in action in 1943, fifty years ago. To his memory this window is dedicated. The generosity of the gift is high testimony to the affection in which his memory is held. It is for others to detail as much as they think appropriate of what they cherish in those memories. As a devotee of St Thomas More I thank them for their gift and for the opportunity to have another occasion to bring to others something of what I know of this remarkable saint.

Thomas More spent two years at university, at Oxford in Canterbury College, later absorbed into Christ Church. The only impression he records was about the food which, he said, was one level up from what you could get begging on the street. He was pulled out of his humanist studies by his father and finished a legal education in Lincoln's Inn. Later in life he was High Steward of both Cambridge and Oxford Universities.

Despite the brevity of his first-hand university experience, More is a most fitting example to hold up to academics. He was a person who pursued excellence.

First he was among the great renaissance humanists. All know of his *Utopia* that work of intriguing genius that is still today the subject of conferences and the theme of numerous books and

periodicals. The Yale University Press' edition of More's *Complete Works* has made available to modern scholars most of his other writings: his early classical translations from Greek to Latin, and from both languages to English, his original English and Latin poems, his dramatic *History of Richard III*, a first in this type of writing and the basis of the play of Shakespeare and of the apparently unwarranted evil repute of that monarch. His correspondence with the great humanists of the period, among them his friend Erasmus, has been made more accessible. I could mention here too his patronage of the arts such as his commissioning of the painter Holbein to whom we are indebted for other knowledge of the features of More, his family and prominent contemporaries. The letters of More to his young children are also examples of the pursuit of excellence in style and in his relationship with them. He was a pioneer in women's education and gave his daughters equal opportunities with his son John. His constant theme in teaching his children was the cultivation of both virtue and knowledge. He had no brief for obscurantism. His was the motto of all humanists: a healthy mind in a healthy body.

When in public office he wrote a letter to Oxford University in which he vigorously attacked those who were obstructing the study of the "new learning", that is the ancient classics and especially the study of Greek. In his *Utopia* too he lashed out at ignorant theologians who had not availed themselves of the new learning made accessible by the publication of many texts both classical and patristic. Progress in theology and philosophy, he urged, demanded the broadening of the mind through the study of classical literature.

Much of More's later writing was

polemical as he responded to the Protestant Reformers. Even in this area he set new standards in debate, theological depth and, I am afraid, in scurrility and invective. His *Responsio* against Luther tends to make his admirers blush, but, in his defence it can be said that, though he called Luther bad names, he did so in good Latin! More's English controversial works are lengthy, some say long winded, and perhaps a waste of his genius. He was the lawyer exhausting every argument to prove his case in the defence of the Church. I have often thought it would have been better if the Bishops, who commissioned him to defend the faith, had instead got him to translate the Bible. Someone said at our *Utopia* conference at Manly last year that More opposed the translation of the Bible. Nothing could be further from the truth. More campaigned for an English Bible, not only one approved by the Bishop, but *produced* by the Bishops. In fact he criticized the Bishops for not initiating such a project! If anyone had the obligation to produce an English Bible, surely it was the pastors! More's frequent translations of passages he quotes from the Vulgate have a quaint freshness about them that makes one realize what a great translator of the Bible he would have made.

More was also a lawyer, judge, member of the King's Council and chancellor. He despatched justice without undue delay. There was no complaint against him of justice delayed being justice denied. It is said that he surprised everyone one day when he cleared the log of cases before the court giving rise to the pun filled ditty:

*When More some time had Chancellor been
No more suits did remain
The life will never More be seen
Till More be there again.*

If More sought excellence in all these fields of activity it was because of his

underlying wish to pursue it in the one thing that mattered, the performance of God's will. This type of excellence we know as perfection or holiness. Especially his spiritual writings bear out his intense desire to live by the teaching of Christ. These spiritual treatises are unfortunately not as well known as *Utopia*: they remain for many treasures hidden in a field. *The Dialogue of Comfort*, *The Four Last Things*, *the De Tristitia Christi*, and his last letters from prison are classics of spirituality awaiting recognition.

The quest for holiness however, was not just on paper. It was in his real life, with his family, in his use of wealth, his care for the poor, his practices of prayer and penance, his hairshirt and his humble service in his local parish liturgy, his devout reception of the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance, his guidance of family and friends from prison, his growth in the spirit during the time of adversity and especially during his fifteen months in the Tower where he was deprived not only of physical comfort – a fact which caused him to rejoice – but also of religious ministrations; all of these attest to his quest for what was most excellent of all, what he called “the winning of Christ”.

I think that More's uniqueness as a lay saint is also waiting to be exploited. He was out there in the thick of things, in the

politics, the controversies, the wrangling over trade and peace treaties, he was mixing it with political and religious thugs, doing the dirty work of prosecuting criminals and heretics, trying to find time to spend with his kids, educating them for life and virtue, trying to be fair to his wife. Maybe this part of his experience can shed light upon what holiness in the world really is.

I must comment on the third panel of our window because it is a scene that says so much about More; it reveals so much of what he was giving up and what he could have kept just by muttering a few words. It is a scene that moved More a great deal and it is one on which we have his own comments in his last letter addressed from “The Tower of London: 5 July 1535” to his daughter Margaret:

“I never liked your manner toward me better than when you kissed me last for I love when daughterly love and dear charity hath no leisure to look to the worldly courtesy. Farewell my dear child. . .”

More's actual attainment of sanctity is attested by many, not least by his friend Erasmus who wrote shortly after More's martyrdom:

“Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England, whose soul was purer than any snow, whose genius was such as England never had – yes and never shall have

again, mother of good wits though England be.”

As in the case of our Mary McKillop miracles for More's canonisation were hard to prove. But when two Irish lawyers based in London petitioned for the canonisation of Thomas More, an Englishman, the Pope, it is said, thought that miracle enough and proceeded with the decree.

As nine o'clock drew near on 6th July 1535 More was about to play out his own words in his *Dialogue of comfort*:

“Now to this great glory can there no man come headless. Our Head is Christ: and therefore to him must we be joined, and as members of His must we follow Him, if we will come thither...”

More complied with the King's wish. He came to the scaffold on Tower Hill with encouragement, forgiveness and a gift for the executioner, a characteristic jest or two and then he briefly urged those present to pray God for the King that He would give him good counsel, protesting that he died the King's good servant and God's first.

Much more could be said about the appropriateness of St Thomas More in a university college and about the themes referred to in the panels of this beautiful window. Let us hope that they will be drawn out at future opportunities by both scholars and students of the spiritual life.

“MERE CHRISTIANITY” IN POST CHRISTIAN AUSTRALIA

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE JOINT MEETING OF ST THOMAS MORE SOCIETY AND LAWYERS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP 3 MAY, 1993 BY THE HON. MR. JUSTICE HANDLEY A.O.

My choice of “Mere Christianity” in the title was not intended to be disparaging. Perhaps I should have said “no frills Christianity”. I didn't invent the expression, C.S. Lewis used it as the title of a book published in 1952. His aim was to describe in a readable and persuasive manner the Christianity that is common to all main stream branches of the Church.

In the preface he tells us that he wanted to find out if he had succeeded so he showed the manuscript to a friend who was a Catholic priest and to other friends who were Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian ministers. None of them objected to anything he had written, but each wanted to add extra material. The trouble was that each wanted to add something different. Lewis knew then that he had achieved his objective.

When Christians from different

traditions meet it is common for them to say to each other that the things that unite us are more important than the things that divide us. I believe that passionately and I think your presence here this evening means that you probably believe it too.

With due sensitivity and deference, I want to suggest that the things that divide us are the optional extras. We have been collecting these now for 2000 years. They first emerged in the time of the Apostles with the division between Jewish and Gentile converts. Paul fought for mere Christianity and his view prevailed at the First Council in Jerusalem. Later, and again with deference, there was the fuss about the filioque clause in the Nicene creed.

When you think about it the things that divide us do not relate to the great central truths of Christianity. With minor

exceptions we share the same Bible, and the same creeds. Our differences relate to what we do in church and how our churches are organised. The creeds don't deal with these matters. Moreover our differences are not directly based on the Gospels or even the New Testament. We differ on whether some of these are implied or can be deduced from the New Testament texts but there is no doubt that they are not actually stated there. Other differences are only derived from tradition.

People were once persecuted or even executed over these differences and armies marched or fleets sailed for them. Some of them are still significant but others have become relatively unimportant. The dispute between Protestants over the nature of baptism, and whether infant baptism is appropriate

are no longer seen as major questions. Most Protestants don't get excited any more about the choice between bishops and moderators. Some Protestants once attempted to make teetotalism compulsory, an error into which Catholics never fell.

I have far more in common with believing Catholics than I have with so called liberal Protestants who as far as I can tell believe in very little that is recognisably Christian.

The thing about the optional extras is that they can be and are changed. The Vatican Council abandoned the Tridentine Mass and the use of Latin. A few years earlier these changes would have been unthinkable. Recently in my own Church we have officially abandoned the tradition of an all male priesthood. Both decisions have caused pain, and produced division. There is every reason to think that there will be other changes in the future.

Mere Christianity is about Christ and the human condition, about our problems and God's solution. Paul wrote about mere Christianity, when he said "We preach Christ crucified, offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks but to those whom God has called the power and wisdom of God".

Why was Christ crucified offensive to First Century Jews? Because they could not recognise their Messiah in the suffering servant King, and because they thought they were good enough for God.

Why was Christ crucified foolishness to the Greeks? Because they could not take seriously the claim that they should worship as God a man that the Romans executed as a common criminal, and they could not see how such a death could possibly help any one else.

The message – of Christ crucified as

God's solution to the human problems of sin and death – is still offensive or ridiculous to those who are lost.

What about our differences? I am not suggesting for a moment that we should simply give them up. They are deeply embedded in our traditions. Church union is a mirage and not worth the cost and compromises that would be required. However Christians in Australia are less and less committed to their denomination and are voting with their feet either out of the Church, or to another denomination. They are moving, I suggest, in search of mere Christianity.

The lost are not interested in our differences and younger Christians are not much interested either. What is the point of discussing with a lost friend the merits of infant baptism when he has not been baptised, and doesn't want to be. What is the point of talking about the merits of transubstantiation to a friend who doesn't go to a Church?

One of the reasons why Christ crucified is offensive or ridiculous to our non Christian contemporaries is that this message challenges head on the prevailing view that Christianity is only one among many religions, and all are equally valid or equally useless. The dominant opinion is pluralistic, tolerant to the point of indifference, humanist and secular. We have all heard such comments as "you all worship the same God in different ways", and "It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere".

The view that Christ is the unique Son of God and all other religions are invalid cuts right across the grain of contemporary Australia. Our task, the task of each and every Christian in this room is to challenge that prevailing view.

Mere Christianity is the only bridge to God because it is God's bridge, the one that His Son built at Calvary.

There can be no compromise on this issue. This is the cutting edge, and we must not blunt it or give it up. Christ said that he was the Way, the Truth and the Life and that no one, I repeat no one, comes to the Father except through Him. The Early Church had no doubt about this matter. Peter told the Sanhedrin a few weeks after Pentecost that salvation was only from Jesus "for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved".

Australia has become a mission field. We don't have pagan temples with graven images, priests and priestesses but we are nearly as pagan as the 1st Century Roman Empire. I suggest to you that the only message our denominations can take to our community is the message of mere Christianity. We should keep our differences to ourselves and away from the media, because our optional extras simply get in the way. They are after all things about which Christians differ. They are no concern to non Christians except to blunt the cutting edge of mere Christianity.

The Cross is a great paradox – one which the world cannot understand. Apparent defeat was in fact a victory – the end was really the beginning – death the key to life – helplessness a source of great power. Paradox lies at the heart of mere Christianity because it turns upside down the worldly assumptions of the ungodly. In the words of St Francis –

"It is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life."

A LAWYER AMONG THE THEOLOGIANs

(A THEOLOGIAN AMONG THE LAWYERS)

Dr. Warwick Neville – BA., LL.B., M.Div., S.T.L., S.T.D. Research Department

Shortly after Easter, approximately 1750 years ago, the newly baptised, noted rhetorician and advocate from Carthage (later to be elected bishop of that city, and a little later still – 14th September, 258 A.D. – to be beheaded just outside it in the persecutions ordered by the emperor Valerian), Cyprian (the first African bishop to be martyred) wrote enthusiastically to his friend Donatus, sharing with him a number of the profound changes brought about in him by his conversion and subsequent baptism. In the early part of his letter, Cyprian

wrote:

... In courts of justice, in public assembly before the rostrum, let an opulent eloquence be displayed with unrestrained ambition; but when speech is concerned with the Lord God, the pure sincerity of speech depends not on the force of eloquence for the arguments in support of faith, but on facts. Therefore, receive not eloquent words, but forceful ones, not decked out with cultivated rhetoric to entice a popular audience, but simple words of unvarnished truth for the proclaiming of God's mercy. Receive

what is felt before it is learned, and what is gathered, not after long study with much delay, but what is drawn in by a quickening act of divine grace.¹

This is not the time to discuss specific issues, such as genetic engineering, euthanasia, abortion, business ethics, human rights, the ordination of women, important though they are. There will be times and places enough to discuss each of them – and more.

Instead, the only matters which I seek to put before you this evening are facts of the kind of which Cyprian spoke. Put

another way, I will present, in short compass, the "how" and the "why" a lawyer, a layman, would dispose of house, interest in a prominent legal practice, and BMW, to earn the same doctorate in theology, from the same Roman university, as the Pope?

I can put the matter in another way still. In the current edition of *Who's Who* in Australia, there is an entry for the NSW Solicitor General, Keith Mason Q.C. It records his recreations as golf and studying theology. We share the same interests! However, what was once for me an interest, has become my privileged livelihood – that is, theology, not golf. Like the Psalmist who exhorts his listeners 'to come, all you who fear the Lord while I tell you of the great things he has done for' (Ps 66, 16), I note some of the Lord's providence, humour and grace.

My background is unexceptional. My family were – and are – faithful Catholics. Our means were modest but adequate. My schooling was Catholic – in every sense; my academic results very good without being outstanding. I did enjoy considerable success in a number of sports. My faith-life, as a young boy, I remember as being quite strong. I had nothing to challenge my belief in God. I prayed and talked with Him quite naturally, without expecting – or thinking – that He might wish to speak with me instead of always being the patient listener and all-conquering provider presented in the stories of ancient Christian lives and martyrologies I read voraciously.

My faith practice continued throughout my university days. In retrospect, it was, for the most part, a rather unthinking practice. While I never doubted God's existence, or any of the basic tenets of faith which I professed religiously each Sunday, more often than not there was little to distinguish my Christian life from many of my friends, who might have been described, not unkindly, as noble pagans. Also in retrospect, I might just as easily have been described as a suitable devout deist; i.e. I had no doubt that there was a God, but there was little or no conscious contact with Him.

If I may move rather quickly to the early 1980s after some years practising law, principally in commercial litigation. A number of friends spoke of their intention to attend a rally called "Jesus Christ at Manly Oval". As things turned out, I was in Tokyo on business when this evangelistic rally (an almost un-Catholic practice, this holding of rallies!) was held. Upon my return from Japan, I saw – quite clearly – that something had happened to

my friends who spoke openly about things like conversion and having a personal relationship with the Lord.

I went along to some meetings, of all different kinds, following the rally. People were giving easy and convincing witness to God working in their lives. It was wonderful to hear people talk about a faith-relationship with God as something absolutely real, and a vibrant force in their lives. Little by little, I was coming to recognise God working in my own life too. The sacraments were no longer something like ecclesiastical transactions; the scriptures became regular and wonderful reading. Prayer was not the recitation of prayers only, but something to be engaged in actively because I was engaged actively with Someone. Religiosity and obligation were not the foundation of my life. Relationship with Christ was real and personal.²

What was happening in me I recognised as having happened to Cyprian³ and Augustine⁴, of having a restless, and a distracted, heart now finding solace in, and knowing direction and a calling from the Lord Himself. Like Paul, I was recognising that all else was of no value compared to the surpassing worth of knowing – in an intellectual *and* experiential sense – the love of God and the power of His rising (*Phil* 3, 8 – 12). There was something with which I identified when John Wesley spoke of how, in genuine contact with God following a deep conversion, 'his heart was strangely warmed'. My faith was in the process of moving from faith in a proposition to faith in a Person who was divine.⁵

In a short time, a genuinely "eternal perspective" started to be part of my thinking. In 1984, while reading a short book (*Hungry for God*, by Ralph Martin) on my first retreat, I noticed a line which said, "If you are a lawyer, be a lawyer in God's service". Initially, I understood this to mean to continue practising law but in a more committed Christian manner. Later, it came to mean an invitation to learn more about 'God's laws'.

After some time of reflecting, praying and speaking to some heads wiser than mine, I sold all my possessions to finance theological studies, firstly in Washington DC for four years, then in Rome for doctoral studies.

More often than not during these times overseas, as I studied at the feet of some of the best theological minds, I kept asking the question "why have all these wonderful things about the scriptures, the theological tradition and the Church been kept from me?" Far from making me

angry, it spurred me to study further the scriptures and especially the Fathers of the Church.

I was very blessed to come in contact with many fine people; students in Washington from evangelical traditions who were captivated by the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Likewise, the extremely good work being done at Yale by many Lutheran scholars like George Lindbeck and Brevard Childs. Or in Rome, the wonderful students from Ethiopia and Nigeria who would share stories of extraordinary times of poverty, hardship and grace from their countries – all in service of the Lord, His people and His Church.

Enough of the many privileges I have enjoyed. May I conclude with a few words of encouragement? Above all, may I encourage us all to lead lives of holiness and fidelity to the truth, and to do so, not because we owe it to ourselves or anyone else, but because we are grateful to God.

In the sweep of history, the call of God – the authentic call – has always been prophetic. It was not a case of Francis of Assisi, for example, thinking that 'what the world needs now is the Franciscans!' Rather, he sought only to respond to the Lord who did the rest.

The world needs those who know and love the Lord personally and who are prepared to respond to His call. More often than not, our usual response is to form a committee! Saints are a word of God for their age. People, moved by the Lord, e.g. Mother Theresa, the greatest social justice advocate around, are, primarily, what God requires.

Finally, as a model, I am reminded of the magi (*Mt* 2, 1 – 12). Like them, we are called to lives of deep worship and adoration of the Lord Christ. We are called to offer our lives and talents to Him in service of the Body of Christ. What does this involve? It involves being a *homo ecclesiasticus* – a man or woman of the Church. I conclude with the following presentation of such a person:

He knows that ecclesiastical culture in the true sense is never come by without a loving and disinterested knowledge of what may rightly be called the "classics" of his faith. What he will look for is not so much the company of "great intellects" as that of "truly spiritual men", and so he will, as far as possible, get on to intimate terms with those who prayed to Christ and lived, worked, thought and suffered for Him in the Church before him; such men are the fathers of his soul.

Catholic tradition . . . becomes fully intelligible only to him who keeps in the

line of its axis and studies from the inside as one who lives by the faith of the Church.

Since he is a man of the Church, he will not acquire a culture of (inquiry) just for interest's sake, taking pleasure in it "as one who tours the monuments of a great city". (Clement – *Stromata*, bk. i, ch. 1 no.61,3.) On the contrary, he will be wholly at the service of the great community, sharing its happiness and its trials, and taking part in its battles.

He will always make it his concern to think not only "with the Church" but "in the Church" (Ignatius Layola).

... in a true man of the Church the uncompromisingness of the faith and attachment to Tradition will not turn into hardness, contempt or lack of feeling... He will be equally careful not to confuse orthodoxy or doctrinal firmness with narrow-mindedness or intellectual apathy.

... He will hold himself apart from all coteries and intrigue (Augustine: *De vera religione*, ch.vi. no.II), maintaining a firm resistance against those passionate reactions from which theological circles are not always free, and his vigilance will not be a mere mania of suspicion.⁶

With these brief remarks, I thank you for your invitation and encourage you so that 'if you are a lawyer, be a lawyer in God's service'.

FOOTNOTES:

1. There are a number of translations of Cyprian's letter "To Donatus" (CSEL 3,1 (1868) 3-16) e.g. The Ante Nicene Fathers, Vol. V., 275-80. The translation I have followed is from Saint Cyprian – Treatises (trans & ed. R. J. Defarrari) (The Fathers of the Church: Vol. 36) (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958) 7-21 at 8.

2. See the delightful description by Yves Congar, O.P. of the working of the Holy Spirit making Jesus "real, personal and inward", from his *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol.II (trans. D. Smith) (New York & London: Seabury Press & Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) 79-111. The following words from Symeon the New Theologian are cautionary lest anyone doubt God's work:

Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Spirit of God.

Do not say that it is possible to be made whole without him.

Do not say that one can possess Him without knowing it.

Do not say that God does not manifest Himself to man.

Do not say that men cannot perceive the divine light, or that it is impossible in this age!

Never is it found impossible, my friends.

On the contrary, it is entirely possible when one desires it.

Hymn 27, 125-132.

3. See *To Donatus*, op.cit. chapters 3 & 4.

4. See his *Confessions*, especially Books 7-10.

5. See the detailed account of the experiential dimension of faith in H. Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord – A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol.I: *Seeing the Form* (trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) Sections II & III, 131-683. Note, too, Bernard Lonergan's comments on conversion which he calls a "foundational reality ... religious, moral and intellectual". B. Lonergan,

S. J., *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971 (reprint, 1975)) 267.

6. Henri de Lubac, *Splendour of the Church* (trans. M. Mason) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986) Chapter VII – "Ecclesia Mater", 237-78.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

Father Paul Stenhouse MSC, current editor of *Annals Australia* and highly regarded writer and commentator, has agreed to the reproduction and inclusion in this edition of *Utopia* of a recent editorial written by him in late 1993 for the *Annals* magazine.

Utopia wishes to thank Fr Stenhouse for contributing to the Journal of the St Thomas More Society, and it is hoped that there will be included in future editions contributions on topical issues from other eminent writers and observers.

Editor

THE POPE AND HIS CRITICS:

A BROADER VIEW

The curious and friendly visitor from Mars beloved of Hollywood scriptwriters, wends his hypothetical way through the ruins of planet earth's cities and towns in some future mercifully hidden from us. He might be forgiven for believing that he had chanced upon some clues to the fate of long-extinct human society, were he to stumble upon remnants of the planet-wide electronic media output for various days in September and October 1993.

With a hind-sight denied us, he might wonder at the obtuseness of those influential earth people, long-vanished, whose rejection and ridicule of the timely advice of their ageing spiritual leader he was able to decipher from the crude digital speech-encoding form in which it was preserved. None of the contemporary print media had survived the self-destructive forces and anarchy that attended those final centuries.

'What lay behind the naked animosity of such powerful forces towards the politically and economically powerless bishop of Rome?' he might well ask.

'Was it really the Pope's allegedly

outdated and unpopular religious and moral teaching that so angered them? Or could it have been the fact that he spoke with Authority, and not like many of the state officials or politicians, or intellectuals or academics?

'Or was it because his teaching was too hard for most people to accept? Or because he dared to offer guidance to rich and poor alike: to the millions of unemployed, and the exclusive clubs of directors of giant multinational conglomerates?'

Demand For A Servile Church

It would be less than wise for us to await the visit of some hypothetical inter-planetary visitor before taking stock of the sadly not so hypothetical situation in which the world finds itself. And we need an answer to some of the above questions that occurred to many *Annals* readers long before they were asked by our friendly extra-terrestrial.

At least part of the answer is to be found in an address that Pope Pius XII gave in 1949 in St Peter's Square, in Rome.

In it he exposed the demands made by certain Marxist-Leninist regimes on the Church. Almost all those illegitimate regimes have toppled and fallen; and their teachings have been exposed as the lying and murderous doctrines that he accused them of being.

His words, written almost fifty years ago to a different socio-political world from ours, apply even more strongly in the 1990s to those other materialistic regimes that take pride in being capitalist free market economies: '*As a price for being tolerated, the state demands that the Catholic Church be silent, when it should preach; that it turn a blind-eye to violations of conscience; that it not protect the true freedom, and solidly established rights of its people. Such states demand of the Church that it obsequiously and dishonourably shut itself within the four walls of its church buildings.*'

The Catholic Church's Response

The Catholic Church never acceded to those terms, and never will as Bismarck, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Nguyen Tat Tan (also known as Ho Chi Minh), Castro, Tito Ceausescu, and myriad other dictators have found.

Up to the present, neither the finally discredited would-be Tsars in the Kremlin nor the largely WASPish occupants of the

White House have shown any ability to appreciate how the Catholic Church understands her religious role within the political order.

The Second Vatican Council put it thus: '*Christ to be sure gave his Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose which he set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission comes a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to divine law.*' (Gadium et Spec)

While the Catholic Church claims no political voice per se, she does insist that per accidens, her spiritual authority has effects in the socio-economic and political order than can be ignored only at the risk of putting humankind's very future in peril.

John Paul's Dream of a Just World

The unabashed hatred for the present Pope and the Catholic Church evidenced by the bitter personal attacks on the Pontiff, regular exposes of alleged corruption in the Vatican, sensationalist handling of alleged and proven moral lapses on the part of priests and religious, orchestrated attacks by U.S. based and funded fundamentalist churches on Catholics, especially in South America, the Philippines and South East Asia and Africa, all point to an all-out campaign of denigration of the Church and her structures.

The present Pope's toughest criticisms of so-called 'Super-Power politics' is to be found in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* which was attacked by such unlikely bed-fellows as the *New York Times* and the *National Review* who declared it guilty of claiming that Soviet and U.S. policy differed very little in the effects that they had on developing countries.

The Pope is well-known as favouring the devaluation of all so-called Super-Power status, in favour of a more pluralistic international system. In other words, Papal policy seeks more freedom and living space for small and middle powers to determine their own destiny in the international arena. The Pope's real

view of the 'New Order' is of an international system based on the equality of all peoples, regardless of their size or financial ranking, and on the respect due to their legitimate differences.

Having exercised a dramatic influence of the resolution of East West tension, and overseen the destruction of Communism in its heartland, the Pope continues to press North-South issues, and criticises the functioning of the West's much vaunted economic system and its very foundations. He singles out for criticism in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* the trading system, the monetary system and international organisations in urgent need of restructuring.

At every turn his message is as unwelcome in Wall Street and the Pentagon as it is to the arms manufacturers and the Octogon. He has resolutely refused to sanction any use of force to effect social change, and declared unequivocally in Ireland in 1979 'violence is unworthy of man'.

Just as Pope Paul VI's distancing of the Church from the hereditary monarchs and aristocrats of Western Europe, many of whom depended for their original status on the Papacy, brought down upon him unparalleled personal attacks, so John Paul's shifting of the Catholic Church from an uneasy alliance with the West to a distancing from both West and East, in favour of the impoverished South, has brought upon him personal attacks of equal ferocity.

Veritatis Splendor

The general rules that the Pope enunciates in this beautiful and profound document have long ceased to be regulatory in economic or political life. Is it any wonder that his attempts to encourage respect for them in social or domestic life in the closing years of the twentieth century should be opposed vigorously by vested interests opposed to the Catholic Church?

The recent battering that the media gave the Pope illustrates well the difference between two kinds of lies: (1) the *expression of an untruth*, and (2) the *suppression of a truth*.

Towards the end of his most recent encyclical, the Pope lists actions which in the Church's teaching are regarded as intrinsically evil. He quotes from Vatican II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: 'whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat labourers as mere instruments of profit, and not as free responsible persons. All these and the like are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilisation they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice'. It was only after the above long list of evil actions that John Paul II mentioned, in passing, contraception.

Readers may judge for themselves how fairly the Pope has been treated by the media and by many, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who quite clearly had not even read the encyclical they were attacking.

Those who 'inflict' the evils enumerated by the Pope are smarting under the suggestion that they may be more contaminated by them than are those who actually suffer from them.

But no amount of personal attack, or negative criticism in the media, will deflect the Catholic Church from her attempts to lead the way for the construction of an international 'New Order' that will be able, legally, economically, politically and morally to meet the needs of what Pope John XXIII called the 'Universal Common Good'.

If the critics do not prevail, then our hypothetical Martian will find a landscape less depressing than the one sketched above, when he finally arrives.

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