

LECTURE

Priests and the Social Gospel

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Address to the Clergy of the Archdiocese of Baltimore
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Introduction

Thanks to one and all. I am always happy to be with brother priests. Baltimore is of course the archdiocese from which we all spring. It took you folks a long time before my diocese came into being but I am certain your prayers were part of it. In your archbishop you have one of the most thoughtful and persuasive leaders of the Church in the United States. I am happy to call him my friend and I am grateful to God for the contributions he has made to the Church and continues to make now in association with you, the priests of Baltimore.

The title of this conference is "Priests and the Social Gospel". The social gospel is a term that is peculiarly American. Its best known exponent in the last century was H. Reinhold Niebuhr, a distinguished Reform theologian who influenced a whole generation of mainline Protestant ministers. Let me cite just one: Dr. Paul Abrecht who served for more than forty years as Director of the "Church and Society" division of the WCC in Geneva. He was a colleague of mine in the years I did similar work for the Holy See as Undersecretary of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. As ideologies and political parties became more prevalent in the WCC, Paul Abrecht remained faithful and committed to a reformed theology that more and more found itself in sympathy with Catholic Social Teaching.

That said, I am going to leave the social gospel to the Reformed theologians like Niebuhr and Abrecht and instead focus on what Pope John Paul II called, the "most important religious event of the twentieth century", the Second Vatican Council. The Council often has been called the council that developed a theology of the episcopacy to stand beside Vatican One's theology of the papacy. Often enough in the years after the Council, commentators would remark that much was said about bishops and laity but very little about priests, some even suggesting that Vatican III should really concentrate on a deeper understanding of priesthood.

I would like to suggest that, while there is a certain truth I that, there still is much in the conciliar documents about priests and priesthood that it will be helpful for us to place our topic firmly within the teaching of Vatican Two. To that end here is what I will try to do today. First say something about the Church and roles in the Church; then a word about a few of the post conciliar moments of the Church's engagement in social justice; and then thirdly a few remarks about the contemporary scene in the USA with a question or two for you to think about, discuss further or decide that I have made no sense at all. In this I presume you know the Documents and so I will feel free to use them carefully but with full respect for your own grasp of them which surely is equal to mine.

I. The Second Vatican Council

1. *The two key documents are Lumen gentium [LG] and Gaudium et Spes [GS]. But equally important for us is the Decree on the Laity, Apostolicam actuositatem [AA] and the statement on the Life of Priests, Presbyterorum ordinis [PO]. These documents help us recognize the shape and content of the Church and the proper relationship of roles and responsibilities within the Church.*

There are many interpretations of the Council. Some of you know Joseph Komonchak. Until this year he has been professor of Ecclesiology at the Catholic University of America and is the leading exponent in our country of the "Alberigo School" of interpretation of the Council. Abp. Agostino Marchetto has challenged some of their positions in his book of five years ago *Il Concilio Vaticano Secondo*. He subtitles his book, "a counterpoint to the history" and he means to the view of Alberigo et al. Others, most recently for example Ian Linden in his *Global Catholicism*,¹ take up the theme of Cardinal Suenens of Belgium that to be successful the Council had to address the life of the Church *ad intra et ad extra*, concluding that the Fathers were not too good at the latter. According to him, this unleashed all sorts of currents that have caused havoc and progress but as he concludes, "The trajectory on which the Church finds itself, in the developed world particularly, is toward a greater disassociation of laity from clergy and hierarchy...The future of the Church as a force for social transformation, Integral Mission, may now lie in the hands of the laity and Women Religious – who often have to treat the hierarchy as an obstacle to be overcome, appeased or instrumentalized..." (282)

¹ Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism: Pluralism and Renewal in a World Church* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Convinced as I am that the current situation is not that dire, I want to bring to your attention a few elements from the Council that, to my mind, help us keep a right balance and an inspiring vision for social justice and for the Church's commitment to and participation in the task of transforming the world into a place of justice, freedom, human dignity and peace as signs of the Kingdom yet to come. Permit me to make a few points.

2. *First the whole text of LG offers us a structure that is coherent and holistic of who the Church is, how she is composed and what her principal objective are. The structure of LG is not an accident. It has an inner logic.*

Beginning with the "Mystery of salvation" is crucial for a right understanding of the People of God. Two observations on that. Without the sense of mystery and sacrament who we are becomes distorted and reduced to a sociological construct. Our influence in the world is sacramental. It is a sign and an instrument of the unity of God with His people and of God with the whole human family. That is theology, not sociology or politics. The People of God expands and deepens the self understanding of the organism that has been called into being by her head, Jesus the Christ, whose life animates the body and whose spirit leads the body more deeply into the mystery, the sacrament of the Church's existence. That People of God is not divided, one group against another, within the Church. The People of God is not everyone in the Church except the bishops; or except the priests; or except anyone else. Dividing the clergy from the laity using this rubric turns the often badly misused slogan "We are the Church" into a weapon of destruction of Church unity.

But the third chapter on the hierarchy only makes sense if it is within the context of the whole People of God and the following on the laity complements and does not divide the two. Here is where the Council missed an opportunity to devote some significant space to priesthood which would have re-affirmed the characteristics of a sacrificial, ministerial priesthood of *diakonia* that, I believe, would have helped us avoid some of the challenges and struggles regarding priestly identity in the post-conciliar Church.

Briefly then, the two basic aspects the Constitution places in the forefront of who the Church is and what she is about are the call to holiness (with the reflection on religious life tucked in) and our nature as a pilgrim Church with all that entails. These two chapters invigorate one the other. The call to deepen holiness is a condition for the Church to journey successfully in the world and that journeying must necessarily include a commitment to the world whose success is related to the holiness of the Church and her members. Thus in imitation of her head, The Church fulfills a priestly, prophetic and kingly mandate for the Lord and for the world. That office is conferred on all the baptized who, by that sacrament, are called to exercise these offices according to

their proper roles in life. From them come the priests and bishops whose own priestly, prophetic and kingly office is ordained to the ministerial service of whole Church as a participation in that of Jesus as Eternal High priest.

My brothers, I am convinced that this is as valuable a teaching and as helpful a vision today as it was when the Council Fathers approved it and Pope Paul VI promulgated it. If we can recover the content of that teaching and the inner coherence of its various parts for our own life, I believe we have the basis for a renewal of the Church that does not have to fragment the Church's life as Linden sees it nor does it leave us with false dichotomies of liberals and conservative, *ad intras* and *ad extras*.

3. Briefly *the strength of GS for our concerns lies in two simple but central points. First is that Part One remains the most extensive Christian anthropology that any Council has given the Church.*

This is worth re-reading because it gives us a clear presentation of the meaning of the human person in herself and in society. While this is guided and informed by revelation, the Church makes a bold claim: this insight into the person and society is objectively valid and, while it openly and correctly is a theological and thus faith inspired teaching, it is of such exactitude that men and women of good will can find it intelligible and intelligent by reflecting on its meaning in light of their own experiences and the experience of human history.

The Second Part of *GS* examines five fundamental areas of life in the world. While aspects of this may be dated, it is significant as outlining five areas that will always be places in which the Church must be fully participant in the world and thus an active instrument for justice, freedom, peace and charity. This is not the place to quibble over one or another part of the text. Rather it is the scope of the material that I would underline: a faith-inspired and theologically sound Christian Anthropology and a reflection on five areas of human living and human endeavor that demand the introduction of Christian truths as developed in Catholic social teaching.

4. We need to say something now about the Council's position on the laity and its observations on priests, *AA* and *PO*. *Two texts on the laity are important. In LG 31 and AA 13, we are informed that the laity share in that threefold office in their own way by virtue of baptism they have a secular character that emerges them into the world to transform the world.* While priests and religious are involved in the world, "by reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them in accordance with God's will. They live in the world...There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own

particular duties. It pertains to them in a special way to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so loosely associated..." And in AA 13, the Fathers add that by virtue of their participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office, theirs by baptism, the care for the world belongs properly to the laity such that "no one else can ever properly supply for them. It is "an apostolate of like to like".

The priests too share in that same office by virtue of baptism. Yet their conformity to Christ the High priest prioritizes the responsibilities of Christian living in a different way. Ours is first and foremost in imitation of Jesus and in union with our bishop to be dedicated by holy orders to the Word of God, to the sacraments and especially the Eucharist, and to the pastoral care and leadership of the communities entrusted to us. Yet the Fathers are careful to balance that a priest may be "set apart from the world" by the realities of his ordination, he is not separate from the world. Rather the setting apart has a purpose: to guarantee that he can give the witness of ministerial service without confusion and with great clarity for the good of the world. The priest is not to remain aloof. He is to be fully engaged with his people. He is to cultivate all the human virtues that will bring him close to his people and them close to him. And it is not a priestly service just to individuals but must also have a communitarian character. While the priest avoids becoming entrapped by any ideology or party, he is stilled called to be an effective instrument to build up the Christian community and the health of the whole community. This the priest does by encouraging the laity to take their roles in the world, by instructing them on what the Church teaches, by pointing out to them what may be needed for the common good and by bringing about agreement among divergent views so that the ultimate goal of justice brings forth the fruit of charity. (cf. PO nn. 3, 6, 9)

II. AFTER THE COUNCIL

1. *The appointment of non Catholic ecumenical observers and of Catholic "lay experts" was a springboard for post conciliar ecumenical and lay activity.*

One of the enduring initiatives from the Council was the invitation to other churches and ecclesial communities to send official "observers". This simple act, as much as anything said, set the stage and the tone for the ecumenical dialogues that have become an integral part of the Catholic Church. Equally significant was the arrival in the second and subsequent sessions of "lay experts". The Second International Congress of the Laity had taken place in 1957 under Pius XII. That was an impetus for new thinking and new possibilities for the voices of the laity to be heard and their participation in the Church increase. One of them died just two months ago in her native Australia. Rosemary Goldie

was a pioneer. I knew her well and esteemed her deeply. But the reason for mentioning them here is to set the stage of one of the post conciliar developments, the founding by Paul VI of the Pont Commission for Justice and Peace in 1967.

Announced by Pope Paul in his visionary encyclical, *Populorum progressio*, The PCJP had among its first members lay people like Barbara Ward, Auguste Van Aestaendal, Marga Klompe, James Norris and Candido Mendes. These and others, including Msgr. Joseph Gremillion, ushered in a new "justice and peace movement" that made Rome a center for propagating new initiatives from a more activist mindset than had ever been seen before. In the 1971 Synod of Bishops, one of the two documents was *Justice in the World* which nourished a plethora of activities in the Church around the world with its slogan: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation".

Linden in his book *Global Catholicism* moves beyond the Roman scene to talk about the growth of liberation theology in Latin America, the political conflicts in Chile and Central America in which priests and laity became engrossed in "*la lucha*", the transformation of the Church in the Philippines over human rights and political leadership and the nationalist movements in Africa, particularly in today's Zimbabwe led by Robert Mugabe. In all these lay people and to a lesser extent priests became involved in "the struggle", in the denouncing of social injustice and the struggle to establish new political and social communities that espoused justice based on a preferential option for the poor and fought colonialism for full freedom of new nation states and opposed dictatorships for violations of human rights. Linden concludes that there are four different forms or faces of the Church which emerge and are in conflict with one another since the Council.

Here in the United States, it was the time of civil rights marches which had not just a Christian inspiration but also was led by Christian clergy, Catholic priests and nuns. Then followed the anti war movement in which the Berrigan brothers, both priests, became symbols of civil disobedience and almost every Catholic area had clergy and sisters being arrested for one thing or another. The Catonsville Nine is perhaps the best remembered of them all.

2. *While this seemed to be the new day of social justice called for by the Council, there were seeds of a different type that either came from it or emerged in resistance to it.*

In 1971 there were 24 national justice and peace commissions in Latin America's 24 countries. By 1976, there were two. What happened? Some became totally politicized becoming in fact segments of the Communist Party.

Others became ideological and espoused Marxism. These in turn dissociated themselves from the Church leadership. Some organized to oppose Church leadership as well as political leadership because both were conservative and contrary to the will of the poor. A few left the Church to become political parties themselves. In short, the nexus between Catholic faith and social justice was severed.

The leadership of CELAM, seeing this, moved from liberation theology to a theology of reconciliation and discipleship. The Holy Father at Puebla attempted to “recover” and “redefine” liberation theology in more classical categories. The CDF later issued two declarations on liberation theology, one an analysis, mainly negative, on liberationism as being Marxist inspired and the second, more benign, attempting to do as the Pope had done, recover the concept in opposition to some such as the Sandinistas and Hugo Assman et al. who insisted on the priority of Marxist analysis.

In Europe there were similar developments but not as dramatic as those in developing countries. Many moved toward more concrete “development strategies” which led them into agencies like Caritas much as we have here with CRS. Others became again less faith based and more political as with the French Catholic support for the socialist party and the leadership of *Faim et Développement* which declared itself to be Marxist. The result: a mixed bag or a lost opportunity or a series of projects that were doomed to failure or a shining moment that was unfortunately lost because of the opposition of intransigents? It is not for me to decide but it is important for us today. For through it all one of the struggles was the identity of the priest and his proper role in the search for social justice. Was he the prophet to bring about fundamental social change, even revolution, or was he bound to sit on the sidelines while the great struggle went on without him?

III. WHERE ARE WE TODAY: REMARKS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Reflecting on a Personal Experience.* As a young priest working in a mixed parish of working class families and welfare recipients in state housing, I belonged to a group called ABUP, Association of Boston Urban Priests. It was the time of the Great Society with grants for every project you could think of and then, its aftermath when money dried up and new projects for empowering the poor were becoming scarce. In those years we met together on Friday nights in one of the Roxbury area rectories, had a few drinks and supper and talked and planned and griped and told each other stories of success or failure. All of a sudden ca. 1969 a new litany began. One priest after another would show up and announce he was leaving priesthood. The reasons varied but the

discouragement was patent. Frankly it got to be depressing until one of my close friends who had been working in the inner city since 1966 a year after our ordination said simply, "The only reason I can be here is because I am a priest. I have no ticket to the poor and no right to claim their attention or their loyalty except as a priest. If I cannot be a priest for them and with them, then I should leave and be a priest elsewhere."

Much has happened and much has changed from that evening forty years ago. The papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI' changes in the social issues that excite and at times divide us; changes in our perceptions of one another within the Church; the sex abuse scandal; the retrieval of priestly identity; the issue of vocations; the dynamics of parish life. One example: I was teaching Catholic Social Doctrine to a class of theologians in Brighton who were demonstrably disinterested in my subject. After two months, I asked them to respond to the material. I was told with a certain definitiveness that the whole subject was of no interest, that there was nothing to be learned from Catholic social teaching and that it did not jibe with their experience.

This could be a cause for discouragement but I don't think that is necessary. I don't believe we need to use the handy labels like conservative/liberal or neo this and progressive that. There is some polarization and we cannot deny that. But my thesis is not that. My thesis is an invitation that is not a conclusion. The activist social action priest of the 1960s and 1970s reflected the Council insofar as he was not separate from the people but erred in reducing his priestly identity. The reaction of some priests after that was to dismiss any role for the priest as a protagonist for social justice. Neither one does justice to the Council nor justice to the priesthood.

2. Therefore today there is need for a sustained conversation about who does what and what roles belong to whom in the Church. This is not an exercise in putting everything into neat categories. It is rather a conversation that is open-ended. Its aim is to bring us to a deeper understanding of what our roles are, what limits we should place on them out of respect for one another and what would help to move toward a consensus that would advance the Church's witness in the world and contribute something specific from the Church toward social justice, freedom, human dignity and peace.

The corollary to this is that the priest, more than the bishop or the layperson, is the key to the whole challenge. He stands at the middle of the various forces within the Church and is the pivotal figure to move the conversation forward or backward by his word, his example and his pastoral role.

3. Let me illustrate the challenge by a quick look at our recent efforts regarding the Health Care Debate. As one of the bishop protagonists, I can assure you that the USCCB did all it could to influence a good outcome based on a few principles: health care is a good and should be made available to everybody;

abortion is not health care but killing and taxpayer money should not be used for elective abortions which can be guaranteed by the current law of the land, the Hyde Amendment of 1976; freedom of conscience protection for individuals and institutions must be enshrined in the law and immigrants should not be left out of the equation.

Our staff worked together and was extremely effective. It was a very difficult challenge but we regularly were in conference calls and we all were committed to sticking to principles. It was a disappointment when Sr. Carol Keehan and the CHA decided to endorse the Senate version claiming that no moneys would go to elective abortion. Our analysis said the opposite. We are convinced that the very fact that President Obama felt it necessary to issue an Executive Order proved we were right. NETWORK group of religious women also weighed in claiming that the “real pro-life” stance was to support the bill which Cardinal George called “fundamentally flawed”.

What is interesting for our discussion today is the kinds of emails, letters etc. we received. Time and again lay people wrote telling me that I was being silent and that I was derelict in my duty. Others accused me of being a tool of either the Republicans or the President. Some said we bishops were doing too much; others not enough. Yet none of them did anything about the bill themselves. NETWORK on one end and the ALL on the other both acted not so much for or against the bill as against the bishops in a pattern that now has become familiar. Some supporting Obama, like E J Dionne, argued with me on the phone that insuring millions of Americans outweighed a little of money going to abortion. Others on the other end told me I was a traitor because I was not condemning all the “other bad things” in the bill.

This time the bishops stuck to principle. And this is where I want to return to you, my brother priests. I have some remarks for reflection which are not offered in criticism of any person or group. *But we have a mixed bag of experiences that lead to several observations and questions.*

A. There are various models of how we fulfill our priestly roles that vary from country to country, culture to culture and region to region. But all of them are to be measured by the criteria of the Church which trumps the individual, the nation, the culture, the region.

B. In our country, the Catholic Church has contributed much to public discussions on social justice issues. Since the 1970s that has almost always been the preserve of the bishops, viz. the two pastoral letters of the 1980s on war and peace and on the economy. Is this the best way for the Church to become involved in the Public Square?

C. We have done a very good job involving the laity in *ad intra* activities. They have important and active roles in all aspects of parish life. They sit on Boards. They are the majority of our staff personnel along with sisters. This has made the Church a much richer and diversified social group. Is this what the Council was primarily looking for from the laity?

D. Has the laity as Catholics been as much committed to addressing issues of social justice? Have they become the protagonists of the principles of Catholic social teaching in our American society?

E. When they do, have they acted in concert with what the Church teaches or have they sought to find in Church teaching justification for their own American political views?

4. Here is where the priest comes in. Remember that I suggested that there was a lacuna in *LG*? There needs to be a section after the bishops and before the laity on the role of the priests across the whole spectrum of *ad intra* and of *ad extra*? I would like to suggest that *we need a new conversation on the role of the priest based on the forty years of experience we have had since the Vatican Council.*

For our purposes today let's leave aside the internal Church stuff although I do have some thoughts on those issues that probably are not mainstream. Let's look at what has been going on in the Catholic Church and the commitment to social justice. For the most part, the USCCB has done a good job identifying issues and taking public stances. However the USCCB is often open to criticism by one side or another that it gets into too many specifics that are open to honest discussion, debate and legitimate disagreement. This in turn leads to groups like American Life League, Voice of the Faithful and others to become not so much advocates of social policy as monitors and critics of the bishop's right to govern.

Many individual bishops, including your own, have been leading teachers and spokespersons for Catholic social teaching. Yet their voices can become blurred if they too descend too much into the politics of an issue.

5. *The missing piece is the priest and a renewed understanding of his role that makes him committed to social justice and a protagonist for the poor et al but doing so precisely as an expression of his priestly identity!*

I do not mean that the priest should replace the bishop. *LG* and the whole Catholic tradition make the bishop the teacher of faith and morals, the authentic voice of the ordinary magisterium in union with the Holy Father. On the whole I think we can all say that we bishops have not hesitated to do that and have done that, at least in our country, very well. Governance is another question for another day.

I do not mean that the priest should replace the laity. The laity needs to take responsibility for the secular world. *LG* and *AA* are clear. *AA* states that

we, bishops and priests, cannot take that responsibility from them. It is not ours to do! What has happened is all too often that the laity takes their stances based on their own political, economic and social situations with little reference if at all to the social teaching of the Church. And the vast majority of our laity, if they think about it, will tell us that it is up to you bishops to do the work the way we want it done. And that simply is not the position of the Church. (A fascinating paper was given by Professor Robert George of Princeton at Catholic University of America on May 28, 2009. Reprinted at *The Moral Witness of the Church: the teaching of Vatican II on the role of the Bishops and Responsibility of the Lay Faithful*. It is worth a reflective reading.)

Who can make the difference? Who can mediate a growing and deepening understanding of what is needed? Who is the person in the middle of it all with the most moral authority and the greatest impact on the daily lives of people? It is you, my brothers! The priest is the key. I like to think that if the Council Fathers had inserted that section between bishops and laity, they would have given us sound direction that would have helped us keep a better balance in the Church's commitment to social justice. Priests may not have become the leaders in civil disobedience because they would have become the models of how the Church analyzes and responds to the challenge of social justice. Priests would not have grown tired of issues of social justice because they would have grasped the fact that the priest brings the perspective of one, "set apart from the world" in order to show the world the deeper and fuller ways the Church must engage the world.

Our Church is relational because it is a Church whose very life mirrors the relational life of the Triune God, the original community of communion. The Church teaches us that the social realities of life in the world need to be embraced and redeemed. The priest, and especially the diocesan priest, is the man of the community, the one who models, teaches, encourages and promotes the relationships of mutual respect, dignity, social justice and peace that make for a good society that fosters human flourishing for the person and the common good.

In the Decree on Priestly Life, the Council commends us priests to live in the world as the good shepherd and offers us the "virtues that are highly esteemed for human relationships", that is "whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, worthy of praise", all that Paul teaches in the Letter to the Philippians and elsewhere. (cf. *PO* 3)

CONCLUSION

My friend in Boston is right. The poor not only accept us because we are priests. They want us because we are priests. We can get our hands dirty and get very much enmeshed in the challenges that society makes but we do it as priests, as the men in the middle, as the mediators between the truths God teaches about the human person and the realities of our own communities. We can speak out and name the darkness that threatens to engulf the lives of our people and all peoples. But we must never do it in such a way that we compromise the fundamental approach of the Church as the instrument of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. We never do it as partisans who betray our priestly identity to become the face or the symbol or the embodiment of a "cause". We have a prophetic role to play that is not just denouncing what is wrong. Even more it is offering a new vision, an alternative to selfishness, greed, exploitation, power and profit. Such a vision, as *GS shows*, is the truth about the human person and society that is Christ's revelation and the Church's constant teaching. This is not the "social gospel". That is a misnomer. This is the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. It embraces the whole person and every person because it is the proclamation of the Good News of God's plan of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ who has sent us into the world as the Father has sent Him. It is the most positive message the world can ever hear because it is the one message that does correspond to God's desire and plan for all peoples. That has been entrusted to us as priests.

And it is given to us so that we can pass it on. We can promote it. But above all we must model it. We can and must share the lives of our people and advance the causes that will make the social, economic and political lives of people and families better and more healthy but we know and we must show that justice is not an abstract quality but a relation of persons which ultimately has charity as its fruit and its measure.

Listen to the Council Fathers: "Priests have been placed in the midst of the laity so that they may lead them all to a unity in charity...Theirs is the task then of bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody may feel a stranger in the Christian community. They are to be at once the defenders of the common good...and at the same time unwavering champions of the truth". (ibid. 9)

Ian Linden's book, *Global Catholicism*, can challenge us but ultimately it does not help us at all. He doesn't understand the Church or her members for who Christ called her to be. He speaks of four "faces of the church and then invents a "fifth" face to correct the other four. His flaw is fundamental. He divides the Church against herself in a series of power plays by groups who

must be antagonistic toward one another in the Church. We are not antagonists. We are protagonists, protagonists of justice, truth, kindness, fortitude, dignity, goodness, social harmony and peace that seek its fulfillment in the Kingdom. That means we are the protagonists of the Church as a community of communion that models to the world because the Church is the sacrament of God's unity with all humankind.

And that's what it means to be catholic. It means everybody. No one, especially the poor, the suffering, the marginalized, the vulnerable, are outside our commitment as priests. We have something to say from the Church's lived experience and our own identity as priests to the world's issues and to the challenges of globalization on every level of human activity because "there is nothing human that is foreign to the gospel"; nothing human that does not need the gospel.

The quest for social justice is an integral part of the message of Jesus Christ and of the mission of the Church. Pope Paul corrected the 1971 synod on justice in the world by his apostolic letter, *Evangelii nuntiandi* n. 31, on that issue. We priests have a role to play that can never be exhausted by the terms of social justice but can never be complete without a real and concrete commitment to social justice. We priests are the mediators of the Church's message to our people to enable and empower them to transform the society. The laity has that task and, as the Council says, we "cannot take it from them". We stand with them and we make the cause of truth and right our own. We collaborate with one another in teaching and preaching, denouncing what deforms the human condition and proclaiming what promotes and advances it.

Ultimately the work of justice is not an end in itself. It has its own specific objectives but is always measured by relationships, the human relationships that undergird our lives as a community of communion. The promotion of justice, freedom, human dignity and the common good must advance for their own good ends but must gradually open up and lead to love. All the social encyclicals include the call to us that justice for us is motivated by love and leads to love. John Paul II in *Dives in misericordia* and Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* make the supreme principle of love the criterion that must be ours because it is God's measure. It is who God is. For we are the priests of the new dispensation of a love that is love *usque ad finem*, a love that flowed from a cross, a love that knows no end but leads always to life and life eternal.

POSTSCRIPT

Since delivering this talk in Baltimore to the priests of that Archdiocese, I have had the opportunity to share parts of it with lay people at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Parish in Centerport. There I shifted the focus to a series of questions for them to consider and offer their suggestions to me. The questions were simple but basic:

1. What is the role of bishops in the social field? Is it to present Church teaching and encourage the laity to embrace Catholic Social Doctrine and apply it? Is that sufficient or do they have a greater role than just that?
2. What is the role of the laity especially in light of what the Second Vatican Council teaches? Are the laity the principal “actors” in the social field?
3. Do priest and bishops “encroach” when they become the protagonists for social change and social justice?
4. What is the role of the parish priest? Is he always the man in the middle? Does he have a certain responsibility that must reflect not only his identity as priest but also his relationship to a parish with very specific social, economic, political and cultural characteristics?
5. How do we as Church participate in the dialogue in the wider society, bringing the insights of the Church into the public sphere? Do we have a responsibility to avoid being antagonists with one another within the Church in order to be protagonists of the Church’s contribution to the good of society and the common good of all?

In addition to this, Pope Benedict added some relevant observations in his recent apostolic visit to Portugal. At mass on May 13 with social pastoral care organizations, he reflected on the relationship of justice and charity and the responsibility for the disciples of Christ to be “good Samaritans”. The whole text is worth reading but I would close with this paragraph which admittedly does not do justice to the Holy Father’s whole text.

In its social and political dimensions, this service of charity is the proper realm of the lay faithful, who are called to promote organically justice and the common good, and to configure social life correctly (cf. Deus caritas est n. 29). One pastoral conclusion which emerged in your recent reflections is that a new generation of servant leaders needs to be trained. Attracting new lay workers for this pastoral field surely calls for particular concern on the part of the Church’s pastors as they look to the future. Anyone who learns from the God who is Love will inevitably be a person for others. In effect, the ‘love of God is revealed in responsibility for others’. (Spe salvi, 28) United to Christ in his

consecration to the Father, we are seized by His compassion for the multitudes who cry out for justice and solidarity, and, like the Good Samaritan in the parable, committed to providing concrete and generous responses.

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