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Chapter Five

Jesus Christ: The Social Challenge¹

"If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples you will come to know the truth and the truth will set you 'free' (John 8:31)"

The Context:

This paper has an urgent and practical purpose. It desires to respond to the search by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria "in view of the pressing needs and challenges which our nation laces to search for credible and alternative solutions" (*letter of the President of the CBCN inviting the presenter to the Conference, dated 02.12.1996*). It is concerned further with the questions raised by many well-meaning Nigerians, young and old concerning the abandonment, disorientation, exploitation, violence, apathy and manipulation faced by millions of the great people of our country, many of whom are really malnourished, sick, poor, ignorant, uneducated, frustrated and depressed, denied their God-given dignity and worth, living daily in an indescribable suffering, fear and anxiety without enough indications that there is a "fight at the end of the tunnel".

What can we do about it individually and collectively? As we draw near the close of the twentieth century, history dictates that we take notes and records to survey where we started, where we stand and where we are going for we owe ourselves a reckoning. Actually, Nigeria's problems cannot be taken in isolation. We live in a global village. As you very rightly know, there is a growing universal cry and worry acknowledging certain threats to the entire survival of humankind on this planet. Not only is this cry loud in Virtually all countries of Africa, it is louder in the Western, Asian and American countries. It is not only a

cry about hunger, we now know that it has to do with the apparent lack of meaning and the spectacularly wrong underlying philosophy of life of peoples of our century. An age wrong about God is almost certain to be wrong about man. There is increasing loss of moral and spiritual values and the mounting

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loss of faith in God, a loss of faith in life itself, its meaning and the possibility for any change for the better.

Our starting— point, then, is the urgent reality of our present historical situation. This awareness is characterized by problems concerning life and death in a world that has grown too sophisticated and has developed weapons of mass destruction capable of killing each of the almost six billion inhabitants of this world several times over.

The spirit of our age and of this century was aptly described in poetic caricature by the Briton W.B. Yeats Who was very much influenced by the 19th Century German nihilist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the following lines:

*"Turning and turning in the widening gyre; the falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart, the Centre cannot hold, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world"*
— (W.B. Yeats)

No other age has witnessed so much bloodshed, so many wars, too much inconsistency, deceit, crisis, brutality and death, as our own, no other century knew about the A—Bomb, H-Bomb and N-Bomb, the long screech of falling and raining bombs over humans cost more than 70 million lives alone in World War II, not calculating those who died in camps, homes, under the cold, in anxiety and excruciating situations. Virtually, many people, whether innocent or not have been victims of this vicious circle of violence perpetrated at the service of political, economic, socio—cultural and religious idiosyncrasies. We are witnesses to some of these brutal and traumatic wickedness.

Yet, our century has seen so many exciting and encouraging developments worthy of reckoning, such as the invention and development of the aero plane and of space travel. We have seen the widespread use of electricity, not just for lighting, heating and cooling but also for making possible other revolutionary inventions like the telematics, informatics, computers and television.

Our century has conquered many diseases and through the discovery of the DNA has begun to understand the nature of life itself by contributing to the greater happiness and fulfillment of many ambitions of peoples all over the world. For those living in Africa, ailments such as malaria, typhoid, elephantiasis, tuberculosis, sickle cell anaemia and other diseases once

shrouded in superstitious stupors have been brought into medical and curative possibilities.

External colonialism has been gradually dismantled but we have seen the enthronement of neo-colonialism and all forms of local and international exploitation. We have witnessed various irrational ideological resentment to the left and to the right, to the extent that the dignity of the human person depended on which tribal, religious, socialist or capitalist colour one professed. Post-colonial Africa for example sacrificed millions of her children in Mozambique, Benin, Ethiopia, Angola, South Africa, Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Chad, Guinea, Algeria, Uganda, Nigeria and Biafra (now defunct), Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Congo, Zaire, to mention but a few for ideological and manipulated reasons. The Victims were in the majority children and women.

What is worse, the system is vicious, perpetrating the crisis, creating new differences, producing wealth and poverty at the same time. The system talks about competition, the free market economy, profit and self-actualization but everyone in fact does not have an equal chance within the system to compete. The poor lose from the onset.

Like Father Albert Nolan has shown:

"the system is a monster which devours people for the sake of profits... worse still, the system is now pressing its demands and defending itself with more and more violence... the system was not even designed to solve problems... what we are up against are not people but the impersonal forces of a system which has its own momentum and its own dynamics... How often one hears the cry of hopeless resignation: "You cannot fight the system". (Jesus before Christianity, London 1992, p.10).

There would be no point in attempting to exaggerate these problems. They exist. We have new insights which expose the magnitude, complexity and insolubility of some of these problems. Actually, there are many reasonable and serious people who assert the great fear that many of humanity's problems are no longer solvable and the headlong plunge towards the foul destruction of the human species appears imminent. This is not the so-called prophecy of doom. Scientific theories and experimental analysis based on facts are used to buttress this disastrous picture.

Environmental pollution happens to be on the increase, in rivers, seas and the very air we breathe, causing large geo—physical changes in the ozone layer and the climates of several countries and leading to over flood, desertification overheat and over cold as was never known before. Many have died under these new situations. The environmentalists say that if drastic changes are not introduced very soon, we shall all be killed by the by-products of our own progress.

These are new threats though, and we must be honest to accept them as threats. The world's population increases at the rate of about 80 to 100 million people annually. In concrete terms, this corresponds to the size of the inhabitants of all the fifteen nations of West Africa (excepting Nigeria) and coinciding with the population of the entire landmass of Europe. The population of Nigeria itself gives room for guesswork and some laughter because our governments cannot tell us in all honesty how many we are. The matter has been politicized beyond repairs.

We moved from 78 million in 1974 to anywhere between 120 to 150 million in the late 80's and are now back again to 88.8 million in 1991. The big city combos are highly populated, and what is worse, shanties and slums create such a devastating psychological damage on the children who grow up there that often, all our morality and accepted decency are gone in their vocabulary, added to this scenario is the fact that natural resources and food supplies are diminishing. In the context of many countries of the world, it is noticed that the desert is encroaching on us as soil erosion increases and more and more forests are destroyed. Brutality and wars have mounted in a world where the leaders of nations have sworn that there shall be “no more wars” to the extent that this century was history's bloodiest.

The crisis in our changing times especially in the African countries and Nigeria specifically ranges from basic lack of humanly acceptable and universally acclaimed standards often called “basic needs” such as water, food, shelter, education, health -care, to the need for a more humane and spiritually conducive environment for majority of the citizens. We are told that more than 1.5 billion people, that is, about one out of every four persons in this world as at 1996 experiences excruciating hunger at least on daily basis. Poverty is real. An example with Nigeria's economy shows that “in 1970, the per capita income was 170 USD, it rose in 1980 to 1000 USD, declined sharply in 1990 to 230 USD. In 1994, it was down to a mere 100 USD” Wosa Iglebor, *Tell Magazine Editorial Report*, Lagos, 20. February 1995, p. 3).

Vices and evils persist and there is apparent cultural degradation, the breakdown of morals and traditional lifestyles, materialism of all sorts which rejects God and replaces Him with Gold, institutional violence, bribery and corruption which now are endemic and have become part of the system within the Nigerian social fabric to the extent that sermons against corruption or police touting are taken as a big joke.

We have in our society, the worst forms of dictatorship perpetrated both by the military elite and supported by some civilian politicians who betray the people and their mandate. We are subjects of a society that is unable to control certain oppressive structures as bad leadership, increase in crimes, the growing breakdown of the family and its attendant values, continued dilapidation of almost every essential structure needed for humanity as daily survival in a decent environment.

Currently, new diseases such as the scourge of AIDS, new plagues and uncontrollable and incurable diseases face our outstretched resources which already cannot cope easily with the burden of external trade, the arms trade, the violation of human rights and the general disorientation of values whichever way one may try to look at. Many have given up! Others who had hoped for a better day in their lifetime have had these hopes crashed because of the seeming futility of it all. What is the purpose of it all? Some ask. "You cannot beat them so why not join them or check out? Others ask!

The basic questions many ask are: How did humanity come so low? Why has it been difficult to achieve social justice, political participation, cultural dignity and national liberation for the people? Why is it that our intellectuals and leaders praise and prefer ideological models that have failed to produce economic and social welfare for the people? These systems have in fact continued to undermine the developmental process of our countries through the wild fluctuation in the so-called world market of our exports, through the unequal exchange value of our products in comparison with the industrial products of the technologically advanced countries; through the low investment rates of our export-oriented private enterprises and their evasion of internal capital investment, and lately through the unbearable burden of external debt.

How come that a country as rich as Nigeria in every imaginable sense has been reduced to apparent poverty so that its citizens have now to travel and escape to other countries virtually as beggars for every imaginable mean job, discrimination and inhumane treatment?

In a global context, how come that despite the grand progress in humanity's technical and information machinery, with a new wealth of resources both in educational and industrial dimensions, we are not yet able to arrive at the new world order which could guarantee the much desired self—respect for all, human dignity, coexistence, self-determination, cultural integrity, political participation and international collaboration and sovereignty which the new globalization could offer and actually pretends to offer?

These questions and more are being asked by people everywhere. The Bishops of Nigeria have also consistently asked them in their very many public statements and reflections and have actually came up with answers in the past.

"The Conference observes with deep concern the prolonged distress of the Nigerian nation and is moved by the misery and agony of the individuals and families in Nigeria who are unable to live worthwhile lives and fulfil their obligations and aspirations" (CBCN Communique, 16091994, Dracc, Enugu).

But have they been heeded and adhered to? Are these answers known? Are they followed up in pastoral guidelines? The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in the document "Ecclesia in Africa" exhorts the Church of Africa to serve as the watch dog" for justice and Human Rights by establishing Justice and Peace Commissions throughout the continent. He opined:

"The Church has the right and the duty to advocate respect for human rights in Africa including denouncing conditions imposed by structural adjustment programmes, arms sales and unjust trading". (Pope John Paul II, EIA, 1 995).

In this exposition, we have not tried to exaggerate these problems. There is no need to do this for the facts are real. What is the use of keeping up the facade or trying to save face when everything threatens to collapse around us? The present situation seems to force us willingly or unwillingly to be honest. Many people are concerned both the high and the low. In this moment of truth, we cannot "fiddle while Rome burns".

Hyacinth Cardinal Thiandoum, Archbishop of Dakar Senegal at the opening session of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Africa in April 1994 in the Vatican asked the now very famous question:

"In a continent full of bad news, how is the Christian message Good News for our people? In the midst of an all pervading despair, where lies the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings?" (In Relato Ante Disceptationem, n2).

We are challenged to "consider the signs of the times and translate them in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (GS, n. 1). Solutions of course can be found. Solutions actually exist. But they would require such radical and dramatic changes in the values, concerns, lifestyle, thought patterns and general orientations of our people generally. Such solutions would call people to make sacrifices and accept alternatives which might lower their standard of lives but enhance the quality and in fact improve the meaning of their lives. This is the challenge facing the people of Nigeria. It is the duty of the Conference of Catholic Bishops to remind all of this responsibility and to lead the way.

We might say with some measure of rectitude that in the past," organized religion helped very little in this crisis. In fact, it has sometimes tended to make matters worse. The type of religion that emphasizes a supernatural world in such a way that one does not need to be concerned about the future of this world and all its peoples, offers a form of escape that makes it all the more difficult to solve our problems" (Nolan, A. Ibid, p.11).

With the emergence of the First Social Encyclical in 1891, Pope Leo XIII courageously took a bold step by championing the cause of the workers in "Rerum Novarum". That initiative and prophetic stand in the confused and disoriented world of the industrial revolution and mercantilist society of the 19th Century enabled the Catholic Church and the Bishop of Rome to credibly assert both the authority and the knowledge to lead people to their own secular and eternal salvation. The Church established her relevance in the secular and spiritual domain.

From our knowledge of history, it so happens that Jesus of Nazareth faced comparatively the same socio—political, economic religious and cultural disarray which so many societies including Nigeria today face. Many people, who lived before, during and after the time of Jesus, believed very strongly that with the trend of events, the world was on the brink of an apocalyptic catastrophe, it was the "end of the world" syndrome. The Romans colonized Palestine in 63 BCE. In accordance with their policy of appointing native rulers in their colonies, they eventually made Herod, the most powerful claimant, King of the Jews.

Jesus was born during the reign of this King Herod, whose death brought the political turmoil of a divided Kingdom among his sons (Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Herod Philip). The epoch began with a rebellion inspired by Judas the Galilean who on religious grounds refused that Jews should pay any taxes to the Romans. With direct Roman rule, the last and most turbulent epoch in the history of the Jewish nation entered, leading to the almost total destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the entire nation in 70 CE. and their final and complete destruction in 135 CE, a time during which Jesus lived, worked and died and during which the Christian Communities grew and spread.

All sorts of groups flourished with several theories and conflicting tendencies like we find in today's Nigeria. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Zealots, the Scribes, the Priests and Elders, the Qumran community, the simple citizens among the several other groupings developed various strategies to the threat of Roman imperialism and the news concerning the world's close ending.

There was search for a way out, a new leader, preferably a King whose reign shall lead to the temporal and perhaps eternal salvation of the people of Israel. This was the background of John the Baptist and of Jesus of Nazareth.

John the Baptist challenged the people with harsh words:

"Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming retribution? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance... Yes, even now the axe is being laid to the root of the trees, so that any tree failing to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire" (Luke:3, 7ff; Mk1,4, ff). "Repent for the Kingdom of God is close at hand" (Matt 3:1 ff).

John appealed for social morality, not just for a change of ritual purity or petty details of Sabbath observance. He challenged the people including the mighty Herod for immorality and injustice. He lost his life for daring to speak out against the mighty. But his message spread thus:

"If anyone has two tunics, he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same... To the tax collectors he said;" exact no more than your rate" ... To the soldiers he said" no intimidation! no extortion! Be content with your pay!" (Luke 3:11—14).

Jesus may not have agreed with John in every detail. But he used John as his own point of departure, calling people to repentance and change of lifestyle:

"The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel" (Mk. 1:15).

Jesus read the signs of the times and gave his message. He made himself relevant and made sure that in fulfilment of the Will of the Father, he was faithful to the end, even to the excruciating passion and shameful death on the Cross. Those who followed him and his message have seen his power, capable of changing entire human history.

Those who neglect him and his message have done this but not without some repercussions on their world view, general happiness and lifestyle as we have tried to portray in exposing the context of our reflection above. Things would never be the same again. The consequences worldwide are there for all to see.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION: JESUS CHRIST?

The American weekly, NEWSWEEK, published sometime in 1977 the results of a wide investigation under the heading: *HAS THE CHURCH LOST ITS SOUL?* Twenty years later, this question still seems very relevant and is being asked directly, even though, it could be reformulated in different forms for different groups – politicians, nations, associations, churches, economists, various professionals, to mention but a few. Put in other words: Has humanity lost its soul? The controversial theologian Hans Kung had reflected on this question in a lecture he delivered at the St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin sometime in 1967, questions which because of their relevance and urgency bear repetition here (refer: Kung, H., *what must remain in the Church*, Collins, 1977).

Against the background of the Asian continent with a population of 65 percent of the world's population, made up mainly of religious groups such as Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Taoists etc., what is the point of Christianity and why do we still need Christian missionaries? If today we affirm all the religious values of the world-religions in Asia as valid (and there are many of them, namely, peace, love, justice, truth, tolerance, compassion), and make them our own, where does Christianity still have a relevance or a mission?

Such a question can still be asked as we approach the year 2000 as well as reflect upon within the context of Africa in general and concretely Nigeria, a multi-cultural and multi—religious society. In other words, what is the

essence of mission? And what is our response faced with the challenges posed by the very many competing Pentecostal and commercialized religious groupings, associations some of them Charlatans and road side preachers whose messages are essentially dubious and or money making spree?

The central question could also be reflected upon within the reality of today's western nations in Europe and America who have come up with modern humanistic theories, focusing on human dignity, human rights, human values, discipline, order and equality of all before the law but without God as the point of departure, religion as its ideal, or the Church as the motivating factor for its modern humanism. If already we affirm the entire human values of the modern secular world, what have we of our own that we could call the specific Christian reality? Has not Christianity made itself superfluous?

One more serious question that cannot simply be dismissed as conservative, reactionary or even progressive, raised by both the old and the young, and raised within the Churches and especially in the Catholic Church, in view of widespread upheavals, liturgical adaptations, innovations both in morality, teaching and discipline, namely, the question about what is there that must certainly remain when all is gone?

We have witnessed since the Second Vatican Council the various forms of "*aggiornamento*" as introduced and how some fasting rules, pious devotions, the use of Latin, the modernization of the sacraments, the liturgical calendar, the roll call of the saints, the role of women, democratic behaviour even within the Church hierarchy and the very many positions of the Church on issues of ethics, the economy, political developments have changed or rather adapted to insinuations of a dynamic and changing society. In the context of all these changes, has the Church lost its soul?

Even if we say that none of these things belongs essentially to the soul of the Church and therefore none of them must necessarily remain, the stage is cleared for the concrete question: What then is the soul of the Church? What is its principle of life, the basic message on which the Church is built, the specifically Christian reality? What is it that must remain in the Church? Since Church's history is so full of changes, what really holds together the twenty tangled centuries of the history of the Christian Church?

Put otherwise, since the New Testament is so heterogeneous, what really holds its twenty-seven very diverse books together? Actually, by knowing the distinctive feature of Christianity, we know also what must necessarily

remain as a permanent factor, an axiom and the Christian reality, put simply and solely in one word, a person: THIS JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF. For there can be no Christianity without Christ.

Following the entire tradition of the Church and the teachings of the Fathers even into our own times:

"The Christian reality must remain. The Church must remain Christian, otherwise it is not the Church of Jesus Christ but just another respectable club or association, Christian self—awareness must include modesty, and Christian certainty tolerance. "Christian" does not mean everything that is true, good and beautiful. Truth, goodness and beauty also exist outside Christianity. But everything which has an explicit reference to this Christ can be called Christian (a challenge both for individuals and for parties calling themselves Christians).

"A Christian" is not just any human being with sincere faith and good will. Sincere faith and good will exist also outside Christianity and will hand salvation there. But someone for whom in life and death this Christ is decisive, ultimately decisive, may be called a Christian. "Christian Church" is not just any group of people with good intentions who try to lead a decent life in order to gain salvation. A decent life and salvation can be found also in other groups outside the Church, since God is greater than the Church. But any human community for whom this Christ is ultimately decisive may be called a Christian Church. "Christianity" does not exist wherever humanity is realized. Humanity is realized also outside Christians among Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, among secular humanists and even downright atheists. Christianity exists only where the memory of this Christ is activated (Kung, H. Ibid, p. 17).

JESUS CHRIST: THE SOCIAL CHALLENGE FOR NIGERIA

"Many millions throughout the ages have venerated the name of Jesus, but few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done. His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing. His name has been used and abused to justify crimes, to frighten children and to inspire men and women to heroic foolishness. Jesus has been more frequently honoured and worshipped for what he did not mean than for what he did mean. The supreme irony is that some of the things he opposed most strongly in the world of his time were resurrected, preached and spread more widely throughout the world—in his name" (Father Albert Nolan, Jesus before Christianity, Chapter I).

Actually, it is not sufficient like the so—called Jesus-People claim simply to sing and say "Lord, Lord" or "*Jesus, Jesus*". Nor is it sufficient simply to quote the words of the Old and New Testaments or sing pious songs presuming thereby that the great problems of the world and of our society would be solved thereby. The bible records that Jesus "*began to do and to teach*".

The historical Jesus of Nazareth lived in first century Palestine. He had some very good and strong convictions about himself, his mission and his mandate and he was willing to die for them. His concern and response to the questions of the people of his time on the issues concerning the "end of time" and "end of the world" prophecies which were stumbling blocks for the people and age in which he lived made him of particular interest to our age and time.

Jesus saw a way out of the vicious circle of sin, hopelessness and resignation into which humanity had estranged themselves. He had an insight into what could be done and how it could be done and he empowered his followers to do likewise. Having conquered death and fear, he showed that apathy, hopelessness, passivity and neutrality could not lead humanity forward. He had an agenda which we cannot ignore safely and still remain his faithful followers. In a word, Jesus' entry into the human plane is by virtue of the incarnation:

"And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) has become the point of departure for all theology, and for any meaningful discussion or practice about human folds' relationship with God and the right order of things in the universe. We live on the Word "through whom all things were made" (Jn.1:3). In our desire to love God, search for the truth and grow in the knowledge of Theology, the incarnation becomes that critical historical moment where God becomes the subject and object of history.

Thus theology assumes the scientific ordering of the data of revelation. The articulation of what we believe. If the incarnation is nullified, Christian Theology would cease to exist. There might still remain magic and all sorts of religious syncretism. There would be idolatry and horrendous paganism, including spiritual voodooism bordering on the margins of pantheistic polytheism of irrational dimensions. But there would be no knowledge of the "Truth in Full".

The Emmanuel therefore of the Prophets, who in the fullness of time became the Jesus of Nazareth is the basis for our ontological insistence that "No Christ, No Salvation" of himself Jesus once said: "I am the way, the truth and

the life" (Jn. 14,6). Our High Prayer at Holy mass places this Christ Event as the summit of our Eucharistic celebration for:

"Through Him, with Him, in Him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all Glory and Honour is yours, Almighty Father forever and ever".

Jesus Christ is the Social Challenge of our times and place. He was not a man of the establishment. He was not simply a political or social revolutionary. He was not even an ascetic monk who would withdraw himself from the world and cut himself off from secular matters. Was he then finally a man for moral rearmament, a kind of devout moralist? But Jesus did not teach any technique of piety and had no taste for moral or - still less - juridical casuistry; nor was he interested in questions of legal interpretation. Actually, the Pharisees were competent for this more than we have reputed them to be so.

Let it be said loudly and clearly as the New Testament bears testimony and the Teachings of the Fathers confirm that this Jesus cannot be fit into any scheme or formula. "He is provocative both to the left and to the right: apparently closer than the priests to God. At the same time freer than the ascetics in regard to the world. More moral than the moralists and more revolutionary than the revolutionaries."

His message was not as complicated as our Catechisms and certainly far less complicated than our theological textbooks. Some are scandalized when told that Jesus was a "lay man", not even a priest in the Jewish calculation of his epoch, and I add, not a professional theologian who produced grand theories. He preached the early advent of the kingdom of God, in an unscholarly way, in the simplest words, with comparisons, stories and parables.

He proclaimed that God's cause will prevail, that the future belongs to God. He preached only one supreme norm for man's action. This supreme norm is the Will of God, This Will would not be identical with any rule, dogma or law, for God's will is actually the well-being of humankind completely faithful to the law, and the Jesus of the New Testament does not hesitate in particular cases to act contrary to the law for the well-being of humankind.

In his teachings, "not ritual correctitude but purity before God bestows purity of heart. Not the pretence of fasting matters but the secrecy of the act performed in freedom which elevates". He is not scrupulous about Sabbath observance for God has made mankind the measure of the Sabbath and the

Law, yet he goes regularly to the Temple and observes all the rituals of the Sabbath which promote human dignity.

In a scandalous way, Jesus relativizes the Jewish traditions and institutions of his time, placing the dignity and worth of human beings at the centre, for “God created man and woman in His own image and likeness” (Genesis 1:27), Here is someone who proclaims, instead of unconditional fulfillment of the law, a remarkable freedom for God and mankind. By so doing, he introduces into the social arena, the thinking and belief in a God who is also there for the irreligious, the sinners as well as for the devout.

For the sake of human beings, he radically relativizes the temple and the liturgy making reconciliation between man and God and mankind among one another stand higher than the demands of the temple priests. With a new authority, he speaks of God, for God and in God's place, making clear to his listeners his peculiar relationship with the Father, for “I and the Father are one”. He makes himself greater than Moses (the law), greater than Solomon (Temple), and greater than Jonah (Prophets).

Jesus initiated the changing of society by radically changing the individual. He calls people to repentance as the point of start for societal renewal, a call which in our times and age is not only relevant but crucially urgent. Therefore, he stands for the love which permits a person to be both devout and reasonable, but which is proved by the fact that it excludes on one, not even opponents. By this teaching and action, ultimate commitment and renunciation points to one sure way of social reconstruction, there should be no discrimination on the basis of language, sex, status, colour, background, language or religion. In his relationship with the Jews and Samaritans, with the rich and poor, Jesus lived a life of universal charity, a call, which in our Church and our times has very vital relevance, urgency and application.

In his life, Jesus shows how much God loves his creatures in spite of themselves and teaches that conversion and forgiveness is possible even among the worst of broken relationships. To the scandal of the devout, he identifies himself with all the poor, the wretched, the "poor devils", the heretics and schismatic (Samaritans), the immoral (prostitutes and adulteress) though firmly giving them a chance and calling them to repentance; Jesus had a place for the politically compromised (tax collectors and collaborators), those outside who are virtually neglected by society because they are lepers, destitute and sick; He gave direct sympathy to the weak many of whom were

and are women and children stating that the Kingdom of God is meant for people like this.

In the life of Jesus, the Good News of salvation became real and incarnate. Not only that the preacher lived it convincingly as he proclaimed it, he challenged his followers to be his witness in the world by following in his example, not minding the difficulties and failures. In Jesus the Christ, theory and practice were inextricably confirmed and has remained the mark of true discipleship. He once taught them: *"By their fruits you shall know them"*. *"For not those who say Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of my Father but those who do the will of the Father"*.

Only now does his person acquire a definitive and unique significance for all who commit themselves to him in faith. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed of God, the Incarnate Word, the Son of God, God's final and definitive revelation.

"Only now is the Church formed as the community of believers who profess their faith in him, the Church which bears his name and is sustained by his spirit, the Holy Spirit: The Church set apart through baptism in his name, united at the meal in his memory. Thus the proclaimer of the message has become the proclaimed. He himself is the summary and concrete content of the message of God's Kingdom, he is himself the Christian message, he is himself the soul of the Church: he himself and all that come with him is that which must remain in the Church."

