

A Defense of the Church Against Her History

Abstract: Jesus Christ reveals agape as the path to GOD. Christ and the Spirit reside in agape. A baptized person who practices not agape obeys not the commands of Christ – thus disregarding the Covenant and uniting not in spirit with Christ nor producing the fruits of His Spirit. A people, nation, or institution cannot be considered truly Christian if it upholds not the principles and practice of agape. The history of the baptized is replete with grave transgressions. Yet, mistakes can be effective tutors. Christ calls us to repentance and reform. Cultivation of agape is the fundamental vocation of the Church.

Keywords: GOD, Word of GOD, Jesus Christ, agape, love, Church, covenant, tradition, evil, blind obedience, tribalism, metanoia.

Prologue¹

Since reality is so vast and its mysteries so profound, Truth, in its full extent and context, resides beyond our comprehension.² Truth, the content of the Logos,³ the Image of Eternal Being, the extension of All that is (and all that ever was and all that has transpired) into the domain of intelligibility, is a revelation towards which we may ever advance. Can we deny, when viewing the cosmos, our grasp of it all, in its totality, is next to nil? Since human understanding is so incomplete, since we cannot see the full picture, are not our acts of volition acts of faith? If all live according to faith, which beliefs prove most logical and reliable, which most wise and mutually beneficent? Given the fact we reside in such intellectual darkness; our very existence and continued survival present a great mystery.⁴ Yet, though existence is a mystery, humans have, to an extent, power to learn, direct activity, create. Experience demonstrates we are capable of attaining practical understanding, and science has found a method to progress along a continuum towards truth: Theories are presented and put to the test in order to evaluate their conformity to perceived actuality. Deviations provide a platform for further revision. The

¹ As in a lecture to a pluralistic audience, I address this discourse to all persons. Yet, since my range of experience, study, and interaction resides largely within the spheres of Western society, Christianity, and Catholicism; I often speak directly to fellow participants in those milieus. Nonetheless, I invite constructive feedback and/or critique from all.

² Let us not confound absolute Truth with practical truth. Humans are capable of distinguishing if a concept conforms with the data of sense perception. Practical truth enables and informs human understanding. It forms a species of truth, for there remains a fundamental difference between practical truth and falsehood. For example, an accurate map which serves to convey relevant information consistent with observable reality is a useful aid for reaching a destination; a false or fake map passed off as authentic fails to provide the information purported and serves only to mislead and confuse. Practical truth provides an honest, reliable, and relevant account of observable reality.

³ Cf. John 1:1

⁴ And provides a tenable basis for justifying belief in a Creator and Sustainer.

scientific method has proved an effective means to attain ever increasing correspondence between human concept and observable reality.

However, while present science diligently explores and studies the physical realm, it seems loathe to acknowledge that other portion of reality to which we all have access: the spiritual domain. If we look within, we find consciousness, intellect, will: it is here we find actual knowledge for (after we have internalized words, numbers, symbols, forms, experiences) we know directly our own thoughts and conscious intentions, whereas our understanding from science is inference based on experience and deduction. The soul (consciousness, intellect, will) is directly visible only to itself (and assuredly GOD)⁵ and indirectly to others by means of its effects. The soul is spirit.⁶ Wherever there is life, there is spirit. Since science is the conceptualization of nature and conceptualization is a function of the intellect, is not science a spiritual endeavor? Cannot the scientific method be reversed and applied to art?⁷ Instead of adjusting theory (concept) to better conform to observed reality, cannot the method(s) employed for the realization of a concept (art) be adjusted so as to better conform outcomes (observed reality) to the guiding mental concept? Besides advancing in understanding of the world, is it not of mutual benefit for humans to also advance in the art and practice of beneficent behavior?

Now our ancestors could not wait (and neither can we) for science to reach infinity and provide definitive answers for all existential questions. Thus, the various cultural communities, by necessity, formed worldviews to make sense of the world and existence - explaining as best they could. The wisdom and practical knowledge of former generations was passed on to their children. If we study the works of Aristotle, perhaps one of the most intelligent humans to have lived, we see he created a vast theoretical system, a worldview, which was rational and cohesive but has been largely superseded by explanations which better conform with observed reality. Thus, a reasoned account may prove inaccurate when carefully scrutinized and tested but can serve as a foundation for advancement. Theory must be tried and refined. Hence, we see as understanding advances so does worldview – again, human understanding evolves.

Now since humans continue to survive, they must be doing some things right. Hence it makes sense to seek to conserve and preserve the wisdom passed on to us from our ancestors. Yet embedded in tradition is a way of life which also includes customs and practices based on erroneous premises and differing circumstances. Thus, how much of tradition is wisdom? How much is fallacy? How much is folly? To move forward, the wheat must be separated from the weeds and the chaff, the superfluous from the invaluable, the beneficial from the harmful in a continual refinement. What can we do but separate out those notions which prove untenable as untenability becomes clearly substantiated⁸ and those practices which prove harmful as

⁵ The Father and Sustainer, whose vision penetrates the whole of Creation. Cf. Prov 15:11; Matt 6:6,18; Luke 16:15; Heb 4:13. How else could GOD hear our inner prayers or judge our intentions?

⁶ spirit: immaterial life-force (including [in humans] consciousness, intellect, will) which unites the elements of a being into a single living entity.

⁷ By art, I mean the act of bringing a concept into concrete existence.

⁸ Cf. Gratian, *Decretum*, D. 8 c. 4.

consequent injury becomes manifest? Tradition should be honored and treasured in that it has brought us this far but also under continual scrutiny that wisdom and the common weal may be retained and advance with succeeding generations. Thus, we face an ongoing yet necessary process of both conservation and adaptation.

Belief in GOD, creator and LORD of the universe, Source and sustainer of life, is a central tenet of traditional, post Constantine, Greco-Roman (Western) culture. As is belief in Jesus Christ, GOD incarnate, the Light of the human race, who, knowing Truth, manifests the way of Life: agape. These beliefs were considered by many of our ancestors as the highest wisdom to be passed on from generation to generation. The literature associated with these beliefs provide access to insights which speak directly to the soul and can only be properly evaluated and internalized by each person individually. We are instructed to: "Taste and see that the LORD is good."⁹ We are encouraged to encounter GOD, the Father, to surrender to and embrace the law of love. Now since GOD is spirit and cannot be detected directly by means of the senses, how can we encounter GOD or "taste and see that the LORD is good"? Shall we thus dismiss and reject offhand the patrimony of our ancestors without first diligently testing their assertion? If they considered Jesus Christ to be GOD incarnate, then they assert we can encounter GOD through Christ - that Christ reveals the Eternal. How do we encounter Christ? Through his received teaching (word). Preaching points to Christ. Study of and reflection on his word (the Gospels) introduces us to him. Through application of and submission to his teaching, we present ourselves to His presence. Since our consciousness observes the soul directly, we can each assess the effect of metanoia (conversion) on the weal (well-being) of our soul. Through the ages to the present, myriads of peaceful and virtuous persons bear witness to the forgiveness of sins, the healing of spirit, the cleansing of conscience, the attainment of peace, joy, and purpose found in Christ. Is it not, then, incumbent on those especially of western heritage to personally test the truth of Christ's claims?¹⁰ And what exactly is the vision Christ imparts to humanity? What concept does he call upon us to realize? Christ summarizes his teaching in two precepts:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."¹¹

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."¹²

These are the principles of agape, the summary of the Gospel instruction. These are the directives passed on to us. Is there an ethic more just or practical? More simply and universally intelligible? More harmonious with reason and conscience? Now if the witness of our ancestors

⁹ Ps 34:9 (New American Bible, Revised Edition - NABRE). Unless otherwise noted, the NABRE is used as the primary reference text for the biblical citations.

¹⁰ John 7:16-17, 10:37-38.

¹¹ If GOD is love (1 John 4:7-21), then does it not follow: we should with all our heart dedicate our life to love; ever apply ourselves to study, contemplate, and advance in the understanding of love; and spend our life in acts of love?

¹² Mark 12:28-31; Matt 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-37. See also: Deut 6:4-5; Lev 19:18; Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36; John 13:34-35, 14:15-27, 15:9-17; 1 Cor 12:31-13:13; Shabbat 31a:6. Modern means of transportation has made neighbors of us all (a global neighborhood).

attests, in essence, Christ illumines the way to harmony with Reality,¹³ then as truth is a perfection towards which to ever advance, is not also the love taught by Christ?¹⁴ For those who believe in Christ, should not the primary focus of daily life be advancement in the art and practice of agape/love?¹⁵

Incongruent with perceived reality?

In contrast to the above, we find emerging in Western society a substantial and growing body of dissent and incredulity which contends against Christianity with accusations to the effect:

- Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular is a failed project rooted in delusion, a conclusion substantiated by overwhelming historical evidence.
- Christianity is primarily a form of social control not a cultivator of love/agape.
- Christians historically and consistently devalue outgroups and force their views upon others.
- The Crusades demonstrated their militant intolerance of alternative worldviews.
- The Inquisition exhibited their perverse and tyrannic need to control public narrative, coerce conformity, and quash critical thought.
- The Conquest of the New World revealed their lethal rapacity for dominion, gold, land, drudges, prestige, and privilege.
- The transatlantic slave trade manifested their total disregard for the suffering, agony, dehumanization, and abuse of others.
- The Christian wars displayed their contempt for one another.
- The Holocaust testified to their absolute hypocrisy. It proved their utter disdain for the life of others, for justice, for agape.
- They are blind to harm inflicted, refuse to admit wrong, and somehow even have the audacity to claim infallibility.

Before attempting to address these allegations, let us first briefly evaluate their cogency:

“Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular is a failing project rooted in delusion, a conclusion substantiated by overwhelming historical evidence.”

According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, the percentage of the population in Europe who identified as Christian dropped from 94.5% in 1900 to 76.8% in 2000.¹⁶ According to a 2018 Pew

¹³ If reality emanates from GOD, then the pursuit of harmony with Reality is the pursuit of communion with GOD.

¹⁴ Cf. John 17:17-26. Even apart from faith, does not the precept “do to others whatever you would have them do to you” seem of universal relevance? Is not justice its own reward? In pursuit of wisdom and eudaimonia, should we not seek harmony with life, truth, and love?

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Thess 3:12; 2 Thess 1:3; Phil 1:9.

¹⁶ Barrett, et al., “World Summary: The Status of Christianity and Religions in the Modern World”, pp. 14-15.

Research Center study, 14% of Europeans attended religious service regularly.¹⁷ Taking into consideration the central position of the Church in the history and culture of European civilization and its modern superseding by secular science and secularism; the data seems to indicate a general disillusionment with and increasing indifference towards the Church, along with a lingering sentimental attachment to Her as an ancestral tradition. Of course, there still remains a loyal remnant.

“Christianity is primarily a form of social control not a cultivator of love/agape.”

From ancient times, leaders of peoples were instructed to make repetitious use of narrative and ritual in order to instill in the credulous cultural values and promote social weal.¹⁸ Unable to suppress the emerging Christian Movement, the Roman Emperors eventually annexed the Church to promote and restore social harmony within the empire.¹⁹ Since that merger (appropriation?), the ecclesial community became collaborators in the Imperial Roman tradition of coercive imposition of conformity – a trend quite alien to the gospel norm of allowing free response to Christ’s call to repentance (the invitation to agape through agape).²⁰ We thus detect the institutionalization of praxis which contravenes the foundational teaching, the example, and the spirit of the sacramental Covenant established by Christ.

“Christians historically and consistently devalue outgroups and force their views upon others.”

The injunction: “Love your neighbor as yourself”²¹ often did not seem to apply to religious dissenters, Jews, Muslims, Native Americans, or Black African captives in post Third Century Western Christian culture – as if the scope of Christ’s directive was not universal, as if the stranger were not a neighbor.²² The Imperial edict *Cunctos populos* (380 CE) compelled adherence to Catholicism and reinforced prejudice and disdain towards non-Catholics. It thus created two precedents incompatible with the Gospel: it contravened religious freedom and denigrated those who resisted against the coercive pressure to conform. Those spurious precedents became normative in the Roman Empire and assimilated as an ingroup/outgroup dynamic in Western Christian cultural tradition. Even today in Western nations predominately composed of baptized Christians, public political narrative is frequently weaponized by repetitious denigrating and vilifying of ideological rivals in order to influence national opinion and mobilize the population against a targeted outgroup.²³

¹⁷ Pew Research Center, “The Age Gap in Religion Around the World”, p. 64. Muslims and Jews were also included in this total - thus the percentage of Christian Europeans who attend service at least once a week is even less.

¹⁸ Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 662-664c; *Republic*, 414-415.

¹⁹ See: *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.1.1; Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 40-41, 224-25, 277-78.

²⁰ This paper will refer to an assortment of supporting documentation.

²¹ Mark 12:31

²² Matt 25:31-46. Exod 22:20 (New JPS translation - NJPS); Lev 19:34 NJPS; Deut 10:19 NJPS. Even in the Apostolic age, partiality/bias was an issue. Cf. Jas 2:1-13.

²³ Cf. Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*; Aronson; *The Social Animal*, pp. 223-28. See: Lippmann, *Public Opinion*; Bernays, *Propaganda*. To vilify is to speak evil of another: to blaspheme (βλασφημέω). See Titus 3:2; Mark 7:20-23; Eph 4:31-32.

“The Crusades demonstrated their militant intolerance of alternative worldviews.”

Was Pope Urban II’s injunction summoning the laity to “exterminate this vile race (Turks) from our lands”²⁴ an emulation of Christ? When the Third Lateran Council, under Pope Alexander III, not satisfied with placing the Christian Cathari under anathema, forbade under penalty of anathema any charitable exchange, trade, or interaction with the Cathari and called upon the laity to take up arms against them, plunder their goods, and subject them to slavery; was that agape?²⁵ Jesus taught but never used violence to enforce his will, even when rejected.²⁶ If Christ is GOD incarnate and Christ never employed or incited militant violence to enforce his will, then by what precedent did the Bishops foment violence in His name?

“The Inquisition exhibited their perverse and tyrannic need to control public narrative, coerce conformity, and quash critical thought.”

By what precedent did the pontiffs require the torture, plunder, and even extermination of dissidents?²⁷ Surely not that of Christ.²⁸ Despite periods of hardship, the apostolic Church thrived amidst the pagan culture of the Roman Empire. Diversity of worldview did not subvert her faith – it seems she stood out as an attractive alternative. So, what happened to the meekness and humility of Christ? How did the persecutee become Persecutor, the liberator become Oppressor?²⁹

“The Conquest of the New World revealed their lethal rapacity for dominion, gold, land, drudges, prestige, and privilege.”

Imperial ambition, not agape, inspires the martial conquest, pillage, domination, enthrallment, and exploitation of others.³⁰

“The transatlantic slave trade manifested their total disregard for the suffering, agony, dehumanization, and abuse of others.”

To regard and treat a human as an object so as to equate that person to property devoid of status, devoid of rights, and subject to absolute ownership; is that agape – or its obliteration?

²⁴ Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem*, 1.3.2-8.

²⁵ Third Lateran Council, Canon 27.

²⁶ Cf. Luke 9:51-56; John 6:63-69; Matt 26:52-54.

²⁷ See: Turberville, *Mediaeval Heresy & the Inquisition*, pp. 150-58; Frederick II, *Liber Augustalis*, 1.1-2; Innocent IV, *Ad extirpanda*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt.II-II, Q. 11, Art. 3-4; Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1.

²⁸ Cf. Matt 9:13.

²⁹ Cf. Isa 61:1; Exod 13:3 NJPS. The Church was a prohibited society (outgroup) within the Roman Empire and suffered persecution at various times until the enactment of the Edict of Milan. See: Baus, *Handbook of Church History*, vol. 1, pp. 128-37, 159-64, 217-28, 389-418.

³⁰ See: Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*; Cortes, *Letters of Cortes*; Cieza de León, *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*; Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

"The Christian wars displayed their contempt for one another."

If we love one another, if each person loves the other as himself/herself, how is war possible? "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."³¹ Is not war disregard and rejection of Christ's teaching?

"The Holocaust testified to their absolute hypocrisy. It proved their utter disdain for the life of others, for justice, for agape."

Does not the Holocaust manifest the horrific and abominable end towards which intolerance of outgroups progresses?³² Yet it was perpetrated almost entirely with the cooperation of baptized persons in the very midst of Christendom.³³ It exposes four aspects of Western culture and tradition which may be exploited for fiendish ends:

1. Self-centeredness (idolatry of self) prevents spiritual union with GOD: the Source, Synchronizer, Sustainer, and the true Center of Life.
2. Irresolute adherence to the principles of agape among the baptized.
3. The license allowed political leaders to foment the latent resentment, discontent, prejudice, and fear of a population in order to attain critical mass and mobilize it against fellow humans by means of false witness, distorted information, and prejudicial narratives which devalue, scapegoat, and demonize the target outgroup.
4. The custom of unwavering and unquestioning obedience to coercive, intimidatory authority - even to amoral mandates diametrically opposed to conscience and the commands of Christ. In other words, the hierarchical cult of Self remains a predominant and overriding form of devotion in Western culture.³⁴

"They are blind to harm inflicted, refuse to admit wrong, and somehow even have the audacity to claim infallibility."

Children can be blind to their selfishness until their eyes are opened: until reflecting on their former actions, expectations, and requests from the perspective of parents. Empathy is agape.³⁵ Christians should reflect on the effect of their actions on others. When harm has occurred, as historical record and contemporary reality attest, we should in humility and

³¹ John 13:35.

³² See: Newman and Erber, *Understanding Genocide*; Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, pp. 3-169; Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*.

³³ 94% of Germans registered as Christians in their 1939 census. See: Ericksen and Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, p. 10. Adolf Hitler, himself, was a confirmed Catholic. See: Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, p. 26. The German population in general offered little resistance or public opposition to Nazi anti-Jewish policies. See: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The German Churches and the Nazi State."

³⁴ Cult of Self: those devoted to the pursuit of personal power, wealth, status, safety, and security - even if it entails heinous disregard of justice. Cf. Luke 4:5-8.

³⁵ Luke 10:29-37

contrition seek and initiate steps toward amendment and reconciliation, as Christ instructs.³⁶ And who but GOD is infallible?³⁷ Is it not presumption and folly for a Christian to make such a claim? Christ may be found in the Church, but the servant should not usurp the seat of the master.³⁸ Is the Church the agent of Christ, the instrument of the Holy Spirit? The author is known by the work. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”³⁹ Such should be the fruit of instruments of the Holy Spirit.

Are there sufficient grounds to assert the charges are without substance? Do they not in fact reveal grave issues in need of attention and resolution? I will thus offer a more detailed response.

Is Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular a failed project rooted in delusion?

“Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.”⁴⁰ “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves!”⁴¹ “Woe to the wicked! It will go ill with them; with the work of their hands, they will be repaid.”⁴² The sheep were scattered but the house not destroyed. Episcopal tongues, from anathemas, now refrain. Crusades: no longer invoked. Vanished, the Inquisition. Colonial approbation, an anthem of the past. Slavery: abolished. We see a departure from practices which contradicted the spirit of the gospel.⁴³ We see movement towards Christ. The Church is still alive. But as life is an ongoing process, so is spiritual development. If we lose sight of the goal, we must be reminded of the objective. GOD united with humanity that humanity might unite with GOD.⁴⁴ The incarnation of Christ’s word and spirit in the flesh of the baptized requires study, repentance, metanoia, perseverance.

The world is ever in flux. Many of the shared concepts, notions, and customs of the apostolic world have been superseded. In order to be intelligible, viable, and believed, the Church must adapt with the culture, speak its language, yet live in accord with Christ.⁴⁵ We must remain true to the Eternal while actively present to the temporal. Within the change (flux), what remains the same? What remains universal/catholic? “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your

³⁶ Cf. Matt 5:23-24; Ps 51:19 NABRE. Psalm numbering can vary according to translation version: Ps 51:19 NABRE = 51:17 King James Version (KJV).

³⁷ Cf. Mark 10:18.

³⁸ Cf. Matt 23:8-12; Luke 6:40.

³⁹ Gal 5:22-23.

⁴⁰ Matt 18:7 (Douay–Rheims).

⁴¹ Ezek 34:2

⁴² Isa 3:11.

⁴³ Cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15.

⁴⁴ Cf. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54:3.

⁴⁵ Cf. Isa 42:10; Ps 98:1 NABRE; Acts 2:4-11; 1 Pet 3:15-16; Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. 3, sec. 193, pp. 351-52.

heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”⁴⁶ “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁴⁷ Are not these two straightforward precepts of universal and perpetual relevance? To what do they lead? Orientation of one’s focus toward the Source and Sustainer of Life, to cultivation of love, gratitude, responsibility, justice, beneficence, solidarity, and peace. Faith in Christ remains relevant.

No human is free of delusion – who can demonstrate omniscience? An assumption is not the same as a conclusion. One reaches an honest conclusion by striving to objectively test the validity of an assertion. All are called to the Father.⁴⁸ The invitation extends to each of us. One who averts Christ’s call by disparaging it as delusion has only evaded testing the integral value of Christ’s directives. Denigration is deflection.

Yet so many actions of the past, depicted in history, and of the present provide a *prima facie* excuse to dismiss the efficacy of Christianity. Is the love found in Christ practiced by the baptized?⁴⁹ Are not humans hungry for love/agape? Does not contemporary disillusionment in and indifference towards the Christian Church indicate a failure of the Church to effectively manifest Christ’s love? Does this not indicate a lack of internalization and embrace of the Gospel principles among the baptized? For how can we understand and follow Christ if we are not intimately acquainted with his example and teaching? Christ led by example. So should we.⁵⁰ Besides receiving the sacraments, is it not imperative Christians internalize and exercise agape? – which requires serious study of the Gospel, prayer and contemplation, repentance and metanoia, maturity and responsibility, dedication to the Covenant. The baptized must learn and practice agape before they can effectively extend it to others. And how can the churches be catholic/universal centers of agape, how can they draw those outside, unless agape be extended to all?⁵¹

Is Christianity primarily a form of social control and not a cultivator of love/agape?

Christ’s words and actions (as well as the sacraments) form the foundation of the Church.⁵² The Gospel reveals Christ’s words and actions (teaching) and thus serves as a constitution of the Church. Is not agape the core teaching of the gospel?⁵³ Thus, is not the cultivation of agape the Church’s fundamental mission?

However, in 380 CE, the Roman Emperor Theodosius promulgated the edict *Cunctos populos* in which he established that apostolic and trinitarian Tradition professed by the Roman pontiff

⁴⁶ Matt 22:37.

⁴⁷ Matt 22:39.

⁴⁸ Mark 1:14-15; Matt 5:1-7:29; John 14:5-7.

⁴⁹ By “baptized”, I mean those who have physically received the sacrament of baptism.

⁵⁰ 1 Cor 11:1.

⁵¹ Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-45.

⁵² Cf. Luke 6:45; Prov 20:11 KJV.

⁵³ Matt 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-28; John 15:9-17.

and the bishop of Alexandria as the religion of the Empire and denounced all dissidents as demented, irrational, and infamous heretics subject to punishment:⁵⁴

“Emperors GRATIAN, VALENTINIAN, and THEODOSIUS Augusti to the People of Constantinople.

We desire that all peoples who are governed by the moderation of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which was handed down by the divine Apostle Peter to the Romans, as shown by the religion introduced by him and transmitted down to this day - the religion which, it is clear, is now followed by the (Roman) Pontiff Damasus, and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity; that is, according to apostolic learning and the teaching of the evangelists, we shall believe in one deity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a pious Trinity. We order all who obey this law to embrace the name of Catholic Christians, and all others, whom We deem mad and insane, to suffer the infamy of heretical doctrine; they shall be stricken, first, by divine vengeance and, second, also by the vengeance of Our wrath, which We shall take in accordance with the judgment of Heaven.

Given February 28, at Thessalonica, in the consulship of Gratian, for the fifth time, and Theodosius, Augusti (380).”⁵⁵

Did not the above decree transform the Church into an instrument of social control? Had not the Church already prevailed, gaining sway even over Constantine and the indomitable Roman Empire - not by force of arms but by word and example (including martyrdom)? Why then should she capitulate and confederate with an institution of violent and militant compulsion?⁵⁶ Did not Christ warn against such alliance? For where lies the binding power of the sovereign but in the oaths of allegiance and obedience imposed upon the people, the legions, and the magistrates?⁵⁷ But Christ instructs us not to take oaths so as, it would seem, to preserve moral autonomy and bypass “obligation” to obey immoral commands.⁵⁸

Let us further consider the effects of Theodosius’ edict. By favoring adherents of Catholicism and denigrating and threatening nonpartisans, the decree imposes conformity (as a master commands a slave) rather than exhorts conversion (as a brother entreats a brother). Invoking fear, it elicits outward obedience and rote participation rather than inner zeal, enthusiasm, and dedication. Exalting one view and repudiating all others, it creates an exclusive in-group, ostracizes all others, and cultivates clannish behavior. It discards with humility, vitiates solidarity with diverse groups, and creates a factious and adversarial environment where fellow neighbors of various outlooks are publicly stigmatized, reviled, and brutalized as enemies. Punishing dissent, it suppresses critical thought and undermines the equal, open, and free pursuance of practical truth and shared common good. Instituting intolerance, it precludes religious freedom, prepares for a reinstatement of the dreaded Roman persecution of religious dissidents, and opens the door to State intrusion into the inner life of religion and the soul.

⁵⁴ Cf. Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7.4; *Codex Theodosianus*, 16.1.2; Mourret, *A History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 2, p. 305.

⁵⁵ *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.1.1.

⁵⁶ Cf. 1 Sam 8:6-22.

⁵⁷ See Turpin, “Oaths, Roman”, p. 85; “Oaths”, *Oxford Classical Dictionary: Third Edition*, p. 1057. See also: Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 226-27.

⁵⁸ Matt 5:33-37.

Requiring obedience, it establishes domination and demands blind submission to authority rather than cultivating responsible liberty and a free and willing embrace of the cross of Christ. It supplants the agency of love with the coercive demand to obey. Is not conformity based on intimidation the weakest form of cooperation and the strongest incentive to rebel? Even Roman Law held as not valid what had been done under duress, nor regarded as full consent obedience to the command of a father or master.⁵⁹ We are led, not forced, into Heaven.⁶⁰ Agape is a free act of the will.⁶¹

Moreover, the edict contravenes the spirit of the sacramental Covenant established by Christ during the Last Supper.

“At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his Passion, he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT, FOR THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.

In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice and, once more giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT, FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.”⁶²

What is the content of the covenant referred to in the Eucharistic sacrament? First, what is a covenant? Is it not a solemn and binding agreement between two parties involving specific commitments from each? Also, would not the Old Testament have provided context for the apostles understanding of covenant? In Exodus we find:

“Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, ‘All that the LORD has said, we will hear and do.’ Then he took the blood and splashed it on the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.’”⁶³

Does the passage not imply, by extension, that all Christ taught, the disciples are to “hear and do”? And that the covenant was confirmed by the of blood of Christ (Christ’s willing offering of his life in the Crucifixion).

But what is meant by “new and eternal Covenant”?

“See, a time is coming—declares the LORD—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.⁶⁴ It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I

⁵⁹ The *Digest of Justinian*, 4.2.1.; 50.17.4.

⁶⁰ Matt 16:24; John 8:12.

⁶¹ Matt 6:9-10, 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 1:26-38, 22:39-46; John 6:38;

⁶² *The Roman Missal*, “Eucharistic Prayer II”, pp. 646-647. Cf. Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-38; 1 Cor 11:23-29. Also, John 6:27-58.

⁶³ Exod 24:7-8. See Exod 24:1-11 for fuller context, also Deut 29:9-30:20.

⁶⁴ Whom is meant by “the House of Israel and the House of Judah”? According to Christ: “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” “Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Matt 12:48,50; also Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21).

took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, though I espoused them—declares the LORD. But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days—declares the LORD: I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”⁶⁵

“They shall be My people, and I will be their God. I will give them a single heart and a single nature to revere Me for all time, and it shall be well with them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them and that I will treat them graciously; and I will put into their hearts reverence for Me, so that they do not turn away from Me.”⁶⁶

The Eucharist, as sacrament, is an initiation into the mystery of communion with the Eternal. It is also a covenant, whereby Christ, as both GOD and man, reveals right relationship between humans and GOD (in the midst of the world and beyond) – that we may be pleasing and acceptable to GOD and GOD present to us as Father. Thus, we are to follow with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength Christ’s example and teaching.⁶⁷ The LORD GOD has given us life, are we ungrateful? unwilling to dedicate that life to GOD? As Christ has done for us, he calls upon us to do for others in remembrance of Him. Hence, we are to serve, to give life and love to others, as a parent gives life and love to his (or her) children - even to the point of death. For in the sacrifice of serving and pouring out our life for others - that we may share in their life and joy (as well as bear and forgive their lapses and misapprehensions) - we ratify with our blood (life), along with Christ, the Covenant.⁶⁸

The Last Supper was also a Passover celebration and thus signifies liberation from bondage to oppression.⁶⁹ Some who see no way out of their straits save through compromise of integrity become slaves to those who purchase absolute obedience.⁷⁰ Christ offers an alternative ethos and vocation - one that gives more than superficial meaning to life. The Covenant is cooperative not coercive, it is based in love not fear, in self-sacrifice not retribution. It posits the free will of both parties.

Just over fifty years after the enactment of *Cunctos populos*, the Church began to fragment.⁷¹ The practice of extending love even to opponents⁷² was supplanted by that of officials imposing conformity by means of force and punishment and assailing outliers. Consequently, the precedent was set which substantiated the rationalization and realization of the Crusades, the Inquisition, imperial conquest, and factional war amongst the baptized. Nonetheless, that

⁶⁵ Jer 31:31-33 NJPS.

⁶⁶ Jer 32:38-40 NJPS.

⁶⁷ John 12:26; Luke 9:23.

⁶⁸ Lev 17:10 NJPS. Cf. John 6:47-58, 63. Obviously the sacrament employs earthly terms to convey spiritual instruction (for what other language do we know?). Does not the Blood of the Covenant signify a mutual exchange of life, sacrifice, and love between the Father and His children?

⁶⁹ Cf. Exod 13:3 NJPS.

⁷⁰ Cf. Luke 4:5-8.

⁷¹ Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church*, vol.3, pp. 219-359. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 1-156, 182-449. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, pp. 205-11, 222-28.

⁷² Cf. Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36.

ecclesial tradition reliant upon dictatorial domination has, over time, largely collapsed.⁷³ For who can force on others inner adherence to a principle? Adherence to GOD is an assent emanating from our very being. It cannot be imposed. You cannot force someone to love. Love is an act of freedom not slavery. The way of Pharaoh is not the way of Christ. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."⁷⁴ Christ came to set captives free.⁷⁵ Christ frees us from enthrallment to other masters. He frees us from bondage to futility and iniquity. Only Truth lights the way of the path of Life. Does Truth reside in the teaching of Christ? Does adherence to agape bring us into harmony with life? Christ proclaims it does. Agape cannot be imposed, it is embraced. How shall we respond to Christ's proclamation?

Did not the method of coercive and tyrannic control over the lives of subjects engender alienation, fragmentation, distrust, and motivate revolutionary change in religion, science, ideas, government, and industry? The Imperial Regime was superseded by the modern world. Consequently, the Roman clergy was displaced from the Imperial priesthood. Thus, the Roman Church had no choice but to reconsider her place in society. At Vatican Council II, she offered a veiled confession of past transgressions:

"In the life of the People of God, as it has made its pilgrim way through the vicissitudes of human history, there has at times appeared a way of acting that was hardly in accord with the spirit of the Gospel or even opposed to it."⁷⁶

She also gave eloquent expression to a bold modern theology which recognized basic human rights: the right of all to act in accordance with their own conscience, the right and responsibility of all to seek and embrace truth, the right of all to the free exercise of religion – all of which imply freedom from external and psychological coercion in regard to the exercise of those rights.⁷⁷ Further, she exhorted the primacy of love/charity.⁷⁸ Thus we see indications of positive reform consistent with Gospel teaching. Yet her statement:

"the doctrine of the Church that no one is to be coerced into faith has always stood firm."⁷⁹

appears quite misleading for what objection did the ancient ecclesial Magisterium offer to the implementation of *Cunctos populos*? Was not the Inquisition an instrument of coercion? Perhaps the following statement is more fitting: "coercion is absent from the exemplar Christ presents in the Gospel."

If GOD is the Creator and Sustainer, is not all humanity of GOD? If all are of GOD, then are not all neighbors? If all are neighbors, then are we not to love them as ourselves? How then can Christians justify or agree to relegating persons to an outgroup?⁸⁰ Thus, is it not for the

⁷³ Cf. Luke 6:46-49.

⁷⁴ 2 Cor 3:17. See also Jas 1:25.

⁷⁵ Cf. Exod 20:2; Luke 4:18-21, 9:30-31.

⁷⁶ Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 12.

⁷⁷ Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 1-4.

⁷⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 42; *Gaudium et spes*, 16.

⁷⁹ Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 12.

⁸⁰ Cf. Vatican II, *Nostra aetate*, 5.

Christian, in accordance with Christ, to regard all as in need of love? Is it not the mission of the catholic (universal) church to teach love through love to all - which, like raising children, requires inclusion, support, honesty, kindness, gentleness, generosity, patience, compassion, understanding, tolerance, and sacrifice?⁸¹ Is not such the measure of the Church's effectiveness, the basis of her authenticity, and her indispensable gift to society?⁸²

Do Christians historically and consistently devalue outgroups and force their views upon others?

Unless pointed out to them, humans can be blind to the cultural biases and fallacious notions they have inherited. *Cunctos populos*, by uniting the Church with the Roman Empire, conjoined her to a dictatorial social structure.⁸³ Contrary to the principles of agape, the edict mandated and embedded intolerance of non-Catholics within the clergy and congregation. But cultural banishment to outgroups is an ancient practice predating the Roman emperors. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) helped propagate the social construct wherein Hellenic men with the ability to foresee with their mind (i.e., form and realize plans) constituted the ingroup; Hellenic women were assigned the role of instruments of reproduction under the law of the husband; “barbarians”/foreigners were deemed natural slaves. Those persons able to apprehend reason but not effectively utilizing it were viewed as natural slaves, possessions of their master(s), instruments of action to be controlled and ruled. Those conquered in war were, if not slaughtered, deprived of status and enslaved.⁸⁴ The Torah characterizes the uncircumcised as enemies and agents of corruption to be destroyed.⁸⁵ Christ, shifting the paradigm, applies the Torah spiritually.⁸⁶ Using neither force nor violence, He calls all to repentance and reconciliation with GOD.⁸⁷ As a parent teaches a child, He counters corruption by manifesting a better way.⁸⁸ Teaching: “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.”⁸⁹ Through word and example, Christ imparts the way of agape. He does not seek to control the spirit of a person by means of the body (force, physical punishment, sensual enticement) but rather to free the spirit from bondage to futility and corruption - leading adherents to communion with the Father (Spirit of fatherhood/parenthood) and with neighbor.⁹⁰ Christ opens the door and invites the outsiders (outgroups) in.⁹¹ Yet, as according to his teaching, agape is the ethos of heaven, the eternal law

⁸¹ Cf. Matt 28:19-20.

⁸² Cf. John 13:34-35; Luke 6:43-44; Jas 2:17-18.

⁸³ See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “imperium”; *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 3rd ed., s.v. “IMPE’RIUM.”

⁸⁴ See Aristotle, *Politics* 1252a-1255b. Cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 7.5.72-73.

⁸⁵ Cf. Exod 12:48, 34:11-16; Deut 7:1-11, 20:10-18, 33:27.

⁸⁶ See John 3:5-6, 4:23-24, 6:63; Mark 1:8. Spiritual circumcision: John 8:39; Rom 2:25-29; 1 Cor 7:19; Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4.

⁸⁷ Cf. Isa 42:1-9, 49:6; Mark 1:14-15, Matt 4:13-17.

⁸⁸ Cf. Rom 12:9-21.

⁸⁹ See Matt 20:25-28; Mark 10:40-45.

⁹⁰ See John 4:23-24, 14:15-27.

⁹¹ See Mark 1:15; Matt 28:19; John 6:37-40, 45, 10:7-16.

of the Creator, adherence to agape is the means of passage.⁹² Christ seeks to inscribe the law of love in the hearts of humans that they may gain mastery over themselves and live joyfully and peacefully with one another and with GOD.⁹³ Is it not for the Church to extend that work? But how can we bring others to Christ if we devalue and spurn them? Those baptized who propagate outgroups or force their views on others follow older cultural traditions but not the example and teaching of Christ. Christ seeks to gather the outcasts, raise the fallen, heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, open the ears of the deaf, set captives free.⁹⁴ “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”⁹⁵ “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁹⁶ The work of Christ is love, instruction, and reconciliation.⁹⁷

The witness of the Gospel, of conscience, of experience, of history, of the denigrated, of scientific study, of constructive criticism can shine light on our deficiencies, our ingrained biases, destructive practices, incongruous justifications and point the way to advancement towards justice, Christ, and peace. Likewise, by examining ecclesial traditions and their historical effects under the light of the Gospel, we may discern their compatibility (or lack thereof) with the fundamental precepts of agape. Should not those traditions which prove inconsistent be adjusted or reformed until brought back into consistency? Should not those cultural traditions which prove discrepant with the golden rule, with the common good, with sustainable interrelations be addressed? John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration* and John Stewart Mill’s *On Liberty* are two classic works which oppose intolerance and compulsion, accord with agape, and have exerted great influence on western society. Again, in conformance with justice, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* refutes those traditions which marginalize women as inferior and as not standing in equal need of instruction in the acquirement and exercise of virtue and wisdom.

With the collapse of the Imperial Order and its norms of state-imposed conformity and degradation of dissenters, the Roman Church, adjusting to the transformation, now teaches, in accord with the law of Christ: All humans enjoy an equal dignity.⁹⁸ Every type of prejudicial discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is regarded as contrary to justice.⁹⁹ She proclaims as consistent with the principles of agape the human right to develop one’s intelligence and to freedom in seeking truth and acquiring wisdom; the right to work and just remuneration; the right to self-determination and free cooperation in pursuit of the “higher common good of humanity”; the right to just independence; the right to be recognized as a free and responsible being.¹⁰⁰

⁹² John 15:12-17, 13:34-35, 14:23-24; Luke 14:27. Cf. Matt 22:1-14.

⁹³ Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16; John 14:27, 15:10-11.

⁹⁴ Christ seeks to restore lost souls to communion with GOD.

⁹⁵ Cf. Matt 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32.

⁹⁶ Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28. Cf. John 13:1-17.

⁹⁷ Cf. 2 Cor 5:18; John 18:20.

⁹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, par. 1934.

⁹⁹ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 29; *Nostra aetate*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ See: John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 47; *On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Beginning of the Second World War*, 8; *To the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 8. Also CCC, 1738. If “what is true for the

“In the exercise of their rights, individual men and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all. Men are to deal with their fellows in justice and civility.”¹⁰¹

And again, Christ instructs but does not coerce. Coercion finds no precedent in Christ. Immunity from coercion is a principle of respect founded in agape.¹⁰²

“... all (humans) are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his (or her) own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.”¹⁰³

“Truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it wins over the mind with both gentleness and power.”¹⁰⁴

Yet, does not exclusivity beget intolerance and vice versa?

It has been stated:

“The Church is necessary for salvation.”¹⁰⁵

Is this a statement of exclusivity, a carryover from *Cunctos populos*? Does not such a declaration elicit, in the minds of many, prejudice (an us/them dichotomy) wherein Christians seem to regard the Source and Sustainer of Creation as confined exclusively within the boundaries of their community and view others as sinful, corrupt, depraved, doomed; and non-Christians find the disdain, sins, contradictions, and hypocrisy of Christians as too distasteful to brook? Should not the Church act in accordance with the meekness and humility of Christ?¹⁰⁶ How can we interpret this statement so as to reconcile the factions? How can we convey the gospel teaching in this situation?

We can say the Church fulfills a necessary role in Christ’s mission by preserving and propagating the Scriptures and Sacraments; by internalizing, assimilating, and following Christ’s teaching; by manifesting agape to others; by bringing others to Christ.

individual is also true for peoples” then what is true for the peoples is also true for the individual (*To the Diplomatic... 8*).

¹⁰¹ Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 7. Regarding the definition of “men” intended in the quote, please see New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, *Gender Inclusive language*: <https://www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/bishops-statements/gender-inclusive-language>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

¹⁰² Cf. Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 9-12.

¹⁰³ Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰⁵ Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Matt 11:29; Luke 14:11, 17:10.

Agape is the mandate of Christ. Thus, is it not agape that is necessary for salvation? Can it not be said, where the spirit of agape resides among humans, there is the Church?¹⁰⁷ And agape acts not with malice, it devalues not others nor menaces dissent.¹⁰⁸

Did the Christian Crusades demonstrate militant intolerance of alternative worldviews?

Christ never assembled a military force nor resorted to arms to settle a dispute. He did not impose his will, he summoned the willing.¹⁰⁹ The use of lethal force as a lever of power is a departure from the example of Christ who preferred to suffer violence rather than inflict it. It is said St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226), during the Fifth Crusade, journeyed to Egypt unarmed and, ever imitating Christ, confronted the Sultan with the proclamation of the Gospel.¹¹⁰ The ancient Romans, on the other hand, considered warfare a valid means for obtaining justice and resolving differences.¹¹¹ In fact, they gloried in war - if fought for what they deemed as right and just reasons and as a last resort.¹¹² We thus detect in the Crusades a disregard of the example of Christ and a perpetuation of the Roman war tradition and the Mosaic intolerance of adherents to a foreign religion. Thankfully the papal preaching of crusades has fallen into abeyance, but the public propagation of denunciation and dehumanization of ideological opponents for the sake of militant mobilization remains a common tactic in western culture. Is not the resolution of a disagreement by means of violence the way of brute beasts, a refusal to treat the other as a brother, an assertion of the principle: might makes right? Is that justice? Is GOD the GOD only of the powerful? Or of all? Humility, care, mercy, guidance, leadership, admonishment, reconciliation these are the way of Christ.¹¹³

Cultural traditions of prejudice, intolerance, and hostility toward outgroups persist. Yet, are not all humans children of the Father? Humans cannot live without water and πνεῦμα (pneuma: breath, spirit). It would seem, according to Christ, these natural truths also point to spiritual reality.¹¹⁴ Thus a living faith should manifest the regeneration of baptism and the presence of the Spirit. Gentleness, beneficence, and compassion should flow from it.¹¹⁵ For does not the fruit reveal the tree?¹¹⁶ Is not that how the apostolic Church grew so vast? Force was not needed, just common ground and communal exposure to practitioners of agape.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1 John 4:7-21; Matt 12:50, 8:10-12; Luke 13:28.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. John 13:34; Rom 13:8-10.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Matt 4:19, 11:28-30; Mark 1:17.

¹¹⁰ Celano, "The First Life of St. Francis", par. 57; Bonaventure, "Major Life of St. Francis", 9.7-9.

¹¹¹ Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.11.34.

¹¹² Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.32.1-14, 45.22.5; Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.12.38. The human mind can be quite creative in fashioning justifications.

¹¹³ Matt 5:3, 5, 7, 9; 9:11-13; 18:15-17. Lev 19:17; Sir 19:13-17.

¹¹⁴ Cf. John 3:1-6.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Luke 10:30-37, 6:27-36; Matt 5:43-48.

¹¹⁶ Matt 7:16-20; John 13:34-35.

¹¹⁷ It could be argued that Roman paganism came to be regarded as inextricably encumbered by superstition and immoral norms. Christianity offered a simplified means to offer "respect and homage" to the "excellent and

Since each individual is to an extent unique, is it not unreasonable to expect complete alignment of worldview and beliefs within any group? But we can expect areas of common interest and the possibility of cooperation and collaboration in projects of shared interest. To force uniformity, in the long run, appears an unsustainable battle and is akin to slavery. Unity is achieved through mutual collaboration. Agape provides a means for unity in pursuit of the mutual or common good.

Since opinions, experiences, abilities, expertise, preferences, strengths, weaknesses, talents differ from person to person, each has a unique perspective and comprehension and is capable of uniquely contributing to shared understanding, harmonious relations, and problem solving. Though we remain incapable of fully comprehending reality, we are capable of harmonizing with life and each other. Observations and insights from all directions are invaluable towards revealing blind spots and inefficiencies and learning from failed attempts and projects. Hence, should not critical inquiry and elenctic be embraced and encouraged? For does not benevolent critique cultivate a broader perspective, breakthroughs in understanding, and advances in sagacity? The greater the variety of perspectives in open, constructive communication and collaboration, the more comprehensive the collective awareness and insight and versatile its discernment. The global collaborative network of the scientific community engaged in critical testing of theories has proved most effective in the advancement of human understanding of the physical world and the development of technology. Cannot also an open and global collaborative network of dedicated persons (such as Christians) engaged in critical testing of concept implementation strategies effectively advance the sophistication, harmoniousness, and scale of the art and practice of agape?¹¹⁸

Yet, what about the Holy Spirit who is to guide us to all truth?¹¹⁹ Jacob wrestled through the night with the Divine until, at dawn, prevailing.¹²⁰ God does not save us without us.¹²¹ It can take much time, effort, and suffering before the light of insight dawns. Parents know how trying it can be to guide a child through a life lesson: advice not heeded, adamant resistance, pernicious behavior, a seemingly endless cycle of repetition. The Church has passed through many dark nights - yet still she endures.¹²² As a faithful parent remains with his/her children through their successes and struggles, so too, it would seem, GOD faithfully remains with the Church, preserving Christ's word and legacy while patiently enduring and correcting her mistakes, disciplining her transgressions, and leading her to truth, till the end of the age.¹²³

eternal Being" who is the Father of "the celestial order and the beauty of the universe." See: Cicero, *Divination*, bk. 2, ch.72; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, chs. 17-38.; Deut 6:4; Isa 44:6; John 17:3; 1 Cor 8:4-6.

¹¹⁸ Art of agape: implementing the principles of agape in the acts of one's daily life; maintaining balance, grace, and harmony between the demands of life and those of love.

¹¹⁹ John 16:13.

¹²⁰ Gen 32:25-32.

¹²¹ CCC, 1847. Augustine, *Sermons*, 169.13.

¹²² Cf. Matt 16:18; Luke 22:31-32.

¹²³ Cf. Matt 28:20. See also: John Paul II, *Letter to Cardinal Rodger Etcheagaray*, 1-3.

In evidence of that forbearing, Divine guidance, Vatican II, expressing the reformed position of the Roman Church, proclaimed the following:

“The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”¹²⁴

And:

“We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: ‘He who does not love does not know God’ (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against [humans] or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to ‘maintain good fellowship among the nations’ (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all [humans], so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.”¹²⁵

Also, St. John Paul II, reflecting on the increase of accumulated wisdom within the Roman Magisterium since the second half of the fourteenth century, proclaimed:

“Today we ought to be grateful to the Spirit of God, who has enabled us to understand ever more clearly that the appropriate way to deal with problems that can arise between peoples, religions, and cultures, one which is also most in harmony with the Gospel, is that of patient, firm and respectful dialogue.”¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Vatican II, *Nostra aetate*, 3.

¹²⁵ Vatican II, *Nostra aetate*, 5. In the quote, “[humans]” has been substituted for “men”.

¹²⁶ John Paul II, Angelus reflection, 12 February 1995, 2. Translation into English aided by ChatGPT and Google Translate.

Thus, endeavoring to overcome ancient, pre-Christian traditions and denouncing prejudicial discrimination, the post Vatican II Roman Church calls upon the faithful to work respectfully and sincerely with all persons and peoples towards mutual understanding and seeking together the common good. Does this not also include denouncing and not complying with directives within our own culture when an us vs. them dichotomy is propagated by means of an insidious and prejudicial public campaign of rhetorical devaluation, denigration, and dehumanization of an ideological target group - resulting in socially isolating the outgroup and enabling its persecution?

Did the Inquisition exhibit a perverse and tyrannical need to control public narrative, coerce conformity, and quash critical thought?

The Inquisition's resurrection of the oppressions of the Roman persecutions,¹²⁷ its use of torture, its plunder and degradation of the accused and their families,¹²⁸ its disinterment and execration of corpses, its horrifying and demonic extermination of dissidents, its prohibition of charity to the victims, its implementation of terror to insure compliance, its extensive and repressive ban on books and intellectual inquiry all left a profound impression upon much of Western society.¹²⁹ Its actions legitimated opposition to papal supremacy - for how can such practices be attributed to Christ? In the Seventeenth Century, two books effectively called into question the moral legitimacy of the Tribunal and initiated widespread, public debate: Charles Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa* (Paris: Daniel Horthemals, 1688) and Philip van Limborch, *Historia Inquisitionis* (Amsterdam: Henriciem Wetstenium, 1692).¹³⁰ Eventually, one by one, the various Catholic States succeeded in abolishing the Inquisition.¹³¹ Yet even after its abolition, did not cultural precedents it reinforced and perpetuated serve to rationalize and condone atrocities in Nazi Germany, the "guerra sucia" of Argentina, and the Global War on Terror?

Christ did not coerce, torture, plunder, degrade, disinter, execrate, immolate, persecute, intimidate, or suppress others. Where do we find precedence for these actions? In Plato we locate proposal to publicly censor pedagogy and practices considered contrary to virtue and the communal good.¹³² In Rome we encounter the office of censor who was charged with upholding the public morals and degrading offenders.¹³³ In the Torah we see instructions to destroy agents of corruption.¹³⁴ These seem to form a general, pre-Christian, justificatory

¹²⁷ Roman persecutions: the infamous measures taken by the Roman Emperors - especially Septimius Severus, Decius, Valerian, Diocletian, and Galerius - to suppress and subdue Christianity.

¹²⁸ Law 31 of *Ad extirpanda* seems to require the destruction of houses and dividing of valuables ten days after the accusation without reference to proof of guilt.

¹²⁹ See: Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1; Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History*; Innocent IV, "Ad extirpanda".

¹³⁰ Bethencourt, *The Inquisition*, pp. 380-81.

¹³¹ Bethencourt, *The Inquisition*, pp. 416-39. John Paul II, *Letter to Cardinal Rodger Etchegaray*, 3.

¹³² Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 376e-380c, *Laws*, 655e-657c.

¹³³ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 4.8.1-2, 24.18.1-9, 39.42.4-12. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 20.13.3.

¹³⁴ Deut 7:1-11, 20:10-18.

foundation of Inquisitorial practices. But let us look deeper into Roman tradition for particular precedents. The pagan Romans held it “customary for torture to be applied to unearth crimes” and its use permissible when truth could be found by no other means.¹³⁵ Romans judged guilty of *maiestatis* (treason) faced execution, confiscation of property, even disinterment and execration of the corpse if convicted after death.¹³⁶ Enemies of the state, deserters, incendiaries, and those guilty of sacrilege were subject to immolation.¹³⁷ Sulla (82-79 BCE) counted it a crime for any to associate with or have compassion on the proscribed (those listed as enemies of the State) and Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus (43-36 BCE) imitated him in this, threatening death and loss of property to any who would assist the *proscripti*.¹³⁸ Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) is said to have ordered the burning of 2000 prophetic books and extended the crime of *maiestatis* even to written works.¹³⁹ Domitian (81-96 CE) quelled criticism through cruel punishment.¹⁴⁰ Decius (249-251 CE) ordered all inhabitants of the Empire to perform a religious act in conformity with the State religion or face imprisonment and torture.¹⁴¹ Diocletian (284-305 CE) decreed in regard to the Christians: the destruction of their places of worship; the burning of their sacred books; prohibition of assembly for divine worship; deprivation of all office, rank, and privilege; inability to perform legal acts; the imprisonment of the clergy; the use of successive tortures to compel those imprisoned to offer *supplicatio* to the gods; the extension to all Christians of the command to offer *supplicatio*.¹⁴² After the transformation of the State religion to Catholicism, Theodosius I (379-395 CE) and his successors perpetuated the Roman legal norms which upheld the use of coercive force to secure and maintain adhesion to the Catholic Church.¹⁴³ Further, Theodosius II (408-450 CE) ordered the burning of books adverse to Christianity and those which called into question the doctrine of the councils of Nicaea and Ephesus - critical discussion of those Councils or of the Christian faith was not permitted.¹⁴⁴ We thus see in the Inquisition application of coercive pagan Roman traditions normalized by those Roman emperors who identified as Catholic. Can the precedent of a Roman Emperor obviate the precedent set by the example of Christ found in the gospels? Do we not detect that the word of Christ still had not penetrated society deep enough to effect the repentance and conversion needed to transform social norms from coercive to cooperative?

If GOD “does not deal tyrannically with His creations,”¹⁴⁵ what sanction have we?

¹³⁵ See: *The Digest of Justinian*, 48.18.1-22.

¹³⁶ See: “*maiestatis*”, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., p. 913-14. *The Digest of Justinian*, 48.4.1-7, 48.16.15.3, 48.18.10.1, 48.20.3, 48.20.11.1, 48.24.1.

¹³⁷ *The Digest of Justinian*, 48.13.7, 48.19.8.2, 48.19.28.12, 48.19.38.1.

¹³⁸ Appian, “The Civil Wars”, 1.95-96, 4.7, 4.11.

¹³⁹ Suetonius, “The Deified Augustus”, *Suetonius*, vol. 1, 31; Tacitus, “The Annals”, 1.72.

¹⁴⁰ Suetonius, “Domitian”, *Suetonius*, vol. 2, 10.

¹⁴¹ Karl Baus, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine* pp. 222-26.

¹⁴² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.1-17; Eusebius, “Martyrs of Palestine”, 3.1; Karl Baus, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*, pp. 396-404.

¹⁴³ See: *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.1.1-8; 1.5.2-6, 8, 12-13, 16-21; 1.7.1, 3, 5-6; 1.11.1-2, 10.

¹⁴⁴ *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.1.3.

¹⁴⁵ Avodah Zarah 3a:12. Cf. Luke 6:35-36.

To what can we attribute aggressive behavior? If a child observes mild and pleasant deportment to be ineffective in gaining attention, does not he or she amplify conduct until it be impossible to ignore? If causing annoyance and disruption proves a most effective means of gaining attention, is not aggression reinforced and normalized? If this be so, may we not say coercion is the offspring of neglect?¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, are not the effects of neglect healed by love and concern?

In the Spring 1994 memorandum sent to the cardinals convoking the Extraordinary Consistory in preparation for the Great Jubilee, John Paul II propounded:

“How can we remain silent in the face of so many forms of violence perpetrated in the name of the faith? Religious wars, the courts of the Inquisition and other forms of violation of the rights of individuals... It is significant that the coercive methods, injurious to human rights, were later employed by totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century and are now being used by the Islamic fundamentalists. From those kinds of coercive methods came the crimes of Hitler’s Nazism and Marxist Stalinism. A correct reaction to all of this is the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* and, in the Church, the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* [*Dignitatis humanae*] issued by Vatican Council II. It is also necessary, in the light of what the Vatican Council has said, that the Church, on its own initiative, should look again at the dark aspects of its own history, judging it in the light of the principles of the Gospel.”¹⁴⁷

Upon reception of Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Inquisition of 29-31 October 1998, John Paul II repeated the following prayer from his Day of Pardon homily of 12 March 2000:

“Lord, God of all men and women, in certain periods of history Christians have at times given in to [forms of] intolerance and have not been faithful to the great commandment of love, sullyng in this way the face of the Church, your Spouse. Have mercy on your sinful children and accept our resolve to seek and promote truth in the gentleness of charity, in the firm knowledge that truth can prevail only in virtue of truth itself. We ask this through Christ Our Lord.”¹⁴⁸

Did the Conquest of the New World reveal Christian’s lethal rapacity for dominion, gold, land, drudges, prestige, and privilege?

The discovery of the New World presented a unique situation whereby the state and nature of Western Christendom could be distinguished by its acts. By overcoming the ocean barrier, Christians became neighbors to the indigenous peoples of the New World. As we know, the law of Christ is to love your neighbor as yourself (and sacrifice of self for the sake of others – not sacrifice of others for the sake of self). Yet the prevalent conduct among the baptized was the militant domination, sacking, and subjugation of the weaker by the stronger carried out with the tacit approval of the Magisterial leaders – for were the conquerors held to account for their

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Luigi Accattoli, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness*, 173-74.

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Letter to Cardinal Rodger Etchegaray*, 4.

grave abuses of the indigenous and trampling underfoot the Christian imperative?¹⁴⁹ Did not such actions greatly defile the Christian name and bring infamy upon the Church? Were measures of justice and restitution implemented? Was disciplinary action taken? Did not rather the Europeans consider themselves as far superior to and natural masters of the native peoples of the New World?¹⁵⁰

Viewing the colonization of the Americas as a social experiment, did not the egocentric self-interest of the predominant group prevail throughout the whole vast region? What did it reveal in regard to the efficacy of the sacraments and the actual level of commitment of Christians as a group to Christ's word? Did it not indicate preponderant dehumanizing bias towards strangers, catechetical formation distorted by prejudice, social taboo proscribing acknowledgment of outsiders as neighbors, ingroup partisanship forming a confining barrier to agape, preference for conquest as opposed to fair dealing and beneficence, a society unwilling to acknowledge or consider the contradictions of its actions in view of its covenant with GOD? For in baptism, we die to self and live for GOD,¹⁵¹ we enter into the New Covenant: we are to love as Christ loves us - He gave His life for us, we, in return, surrender our life to Him.¹⁵² Yet a covenant requires the active dedication of both parties: the absence of commitment to agape is absence of commitment to the Covenant is absence of inner cooperation with GOD is absence of inner communion with GOD. The sacrament is a most priceless gift. It is not imposed. But it requires the active inner cooperation of the recipient to be effective. Catechesis, to be effectual, must foster metanoia,¹⁵³ manifest the fundamental primacy of agape, esteem all humans as neighbors, and prepare the catechumen to face and endure persecution.¹⁵⁴

Since Christ was/is a man of peace and not a prototype for pride, greed, murder, plunder, imperiousness, opulence, or despotism, what traditions were drawn upon to provide antecedent warrant for the Conquest? The Athenians offered the diminutive, non-aggressive, peace-seeking force of the Melians the choice between subjection to Athens, or war of annihilation (416 BCE) – asserting justice applies only among equals, otherwise “the powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must”; holding it a natural law that men, wherever they can rule, will.¹⁵⁵ Alexander and his forces conquered the vast Persian Empire (334-327 BCE) and Julius Caesar and his legions subjugated Gaul and the preponderant Roman Republic (58-44 BCE)¹⁵⁶ - that the persons and property taken in war belonged to the captors

¹⁴⁹ “Love does no evil to a neighbor.” (Rom. 13:10).

¹⁵⁰ Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, pp. 11-13. Lewis Hanke, “Pope Paul III and the American Indians”, pp. 95-96.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Luke 9:23-24; Eph 4:22-24; Gal 2:20, Rom 6:4-11.

¹⁵² Cf. Luke 22:14-20; Mark 14:22-26; Matt 26:26-30; John 13:34-35; Heb 8:10.

¹⁵³ Ezek 18:20-32; Jer 7:5-7; Luke 13:1-5; Matt 3:8, 13:15; Acts 3:19; John 3:3.

¹⁵⁴ Matt 5:10-12, 10:16-18; Mark 10:29-30; John 15:19-20.

¹⁵⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 5.84-114. Quote: p.159.

¹⁵⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis*; Suetonius, “The Deified Julius”, *Suetonius*, vol. 1; Plutarch, *Lives: Alexander, Caesar*. Among the Spaniards, Hernando Cortés, for his part in the overthrow of the Aztec Empire and acquisition of the territory of Mexico, was regarded Alexander's and Julius Caesar's companion in honor: Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of New Spain*, ch. 19.

was viewed as self-evident.¹⁵⁷ Upholding those pre-Christian traditions of martial conquest and countenancing prejudice towards outgroups as enemies of Christ and natural slaves, Pope Nicolaus V (1447-1455) granted the King of Portugal and his successors the authority to invade, conquer, subdue, plunder, and place in perpetual slavery the Saracen, pagan, and infidel inhabitants wherever they resided along the western coast of Africa, south of Cape Bojador.¹⁵⁸ And Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503), “by the authority of Almighty God,” granted to the Spanish sovereigns authority and dominion over any territories (including residents and inhabitants) found “one hundred leagues towards the west and south from any of the islands commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde” and not under the jurisdiction of any other Christian sovereign prior to 25 December 1492.¹⁵⁹ As for the Protestants in North America, they seemed to apply a sanguinary interpretation of the Mosaic injunctions: not to intermingle with the indigenous but either keep them at a distance or exterminate.¹⁶⁰

How different the heart of those subdued by violence and war from those conquered by love and friendship. Not all the baptized sought to exploit the martial inferiority of their new neighbors. Some gave of themselves, seeking to aid and serve. After his conversion, Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566) spent his life crying out in opposition to the crimes against GOD and neighbor carried out by the Spaniards in the New World. In seeking and calling for repentance and reform in regard to the oppression, exploitation, and destruction of the indigenous; he met with adamant resistance. Confronting and petitioning the authorities from the King to the local officials, he continually strove to bear witness to, defend, support, and record the just cause of the indigenous and sought the restoration of evangelization methods consistent with apostolic agape.¹⁶¹

The initial Franciscan missionaries in New Spain endeavored to learn and speak Nahuatl in order to communicate with the Nahua peoples, teach them to read and write, and Christianize them.¹⁶² Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590) was such a missionary. He viewed the Nahuas as brothers and neighbors, “whom we are obliged to love, even as we love ourselves.”¹⁶³ He strove to gain knowledge and understanding of their worldview and culture so as to become an effective evangelist and pastor and assist other missionaries by recording and sharing what he learned.¹⁶⁴ He first taught Latin to Nahua youths. Then employing his best students to translate and transcribe, he spent years interviewing Nahua elders with the object of obtaining a general overview of traditional Nahua worldview and culture and a vast Nahuatl vocabulary.¹⁶⁵ Through this work he at length brought to completion the Nahuatl text of his twelve volume *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (a record of Mexica culture). His ultimate objective was

¹⁵⁷ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 7.5.73; Plato, *Laws*, 625d-626b; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1255a.

¹⁵⁸ Nicolaus V: “*Dum diversas*”, 18 June 1452; “*Romanus pontifex*”, 8 January 1454.

¹⁵⁹ Alexander VI, *Inter caetera*, 4 May 1493.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Deut 7:1-7, 20:10-18.

¹⁶¹ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*. Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, libro 3; *The Only Way*.

¹⁶² León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, pp. 90-91. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, p. 53.

¹⁶³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices* p. 49.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46, 53.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

to include in the *Historia* three sets of text arranged in columns with the Nahuatl transliteration in the middle, a Spanish paraphrase on the left, and linguistic annotations on the right.¹⁶⁶ At that time he also completed a Nahuatl translation of all the Epistle and Gospel readings for the Sundays and principal feast days of the liturgical year (with accompanying vernacular homilies and Christian songs in the Nahua style) and a Nahuatl grammar and vocabulary.¹⁶⁷ Ready to bring all this work to final completion and make it available as reference material to regional missionaries, Bernardino began to face pushback and tribulation.¹⁶⁸ He was ordered to dismiss the native scribes in his employ - for some in the Franciscan governing assembly deemed it “contrary to the vows of poverty to spend monies recording those writings.” He was told to complete the project on his own. This brought the undertaking to a halt for Bernardino was then over seventy years old, with a trembling hand, and unable to write in a legible fashion. Around 1570, a new Franciscan Provincial, Alonso de Escalona, took all of Bernardino’s books and scattered them throughout the province. After several years, Bernardino succeeded in recovering the books and the Franciscan Commissioner General, Rodrigo de Sequera, took interest and commissioned Bernardino to add a Spanish translation to the *Historia general*, providing for all that was necessary to complete the task.¹⁶⁹ While Bernardino was engaged in adding the Spanish text, the Inquisition published an edict prohibiting the printing, copying, and dissemination of any part of the Sacred Scriptures in the native languages or any other vernacular. And the King himself, Philip II, issued a royal order to the Viceroy of New Spain, Martín Enríquez, enjoining him to confiscate Bernardino’s *Historia general* and send it by safe conduct to the Council of the Indies for examination.¹⁷⁰ It is surmised by some modern scholars that the finished version containing only the Nahuatl text was handed over to the Viceroy, while Bernardino continued work on the bilingual edition. Upon completion, Rodrigo de Sequera, returned to Spain with a bilingual edition and highly illustrated (the most elaborate version attained of the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*).¹⁷¹ It then disappeared from history until its rediscovery, in 1793, by the bibliographer Angelo Maria Bandini, in the Biblioteca Medicea-Lorenziana of Florence, Italy.¹⁷² The work, now known as the Florentine Codex, is at present esteemed as a cultural treasure.¹⁷³ It opens a window not only the ancient Nahua worldview but also to de Sahagún’s. Though spending his life pursuing the goal of following Christ, Bernardino remained an adherent to some ambivalent views and practices prevalent in 16th Century Hispanic culture: He and his Franciscan community trained the Nahua youth in their care to flagellate themselves at night.¹⁷⁴ He taught: “The people here on earth

¹⁶⁶ León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, pp. 170-71, 204-05.

¹⁶⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, p. 55. León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, pp. 130, 145-46, 173, 196.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, pp. 47, 53, 55-56.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 55-56.

¹⁷⁰ León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, pp. 209-11. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices* p. 36-37.

¹⁷¹ León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, pp. 211-24. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, p. 37.

¹⁷² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷³ See *Digital Florentine Codex*, accessed 27 February 2024, <https://florentinecodex.getty.edu/>.

¹⁷⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, p. 77.

who do not know God are not counted as human; they are only vain, worthless.”¹⁷⁵ He seemingly regarded the whole Nahua religion as evil and did not appreciate the value and efficacy of building upon positive cultural traditions not incompatible with Christianity. Thus, he considered the momentous veneration offered each year on Tepeyac Hill to Our Lady of Guadalupe as idolatrous.¹⁷⁶ In fact, late in life, he was of the opinion that the Christian faith would not take root among the indigenous of New Spain.¹⁷⁷ Sahagún wanted to supplant the ancient traditions of the natives and compel them to embrace a Christian substitute culture. He, as did perhaps most of the Spaniards, viewed the natives as idolaters and as sick.¹⁷⁸ Though he deeply engaged with the indigenous society, his method still relied upon prohibition, punishment, force. Yet it seems to exceed the bounds of agape to demand a person or people to betray and forsake the culture of their ancestors.¹⁷⁹ Rather is it not the way of Christ to transcend together, without force, those customs inconsistent with agape?

Another Bernardino, Bernardino de Minaya (c. 1489-1559), was an effective missionary in New Spain and Nicaragua, and who, upon joining [Francisco] Pizarro in Peru, noticed how the indigenous villages were being depopulated and the inhabitants sold into slavery. He proclaimed before Pizarro and his fellow *conquistadores* the Imperial law prohibiting enslavement of “*los indios*” and procured termination of the immediate operation. Unable to convince Pizarro to leave off plundering gold from the Incas, Minaya suffered the ire of the disappointed slave traders as he returned with them to Panama. From Panama he journeyed to Mexico where he learned Cardinal Loaysa, President of the Council of the Indies, had issued a law allowing captains to enslave the indigenous at will, under pretext they were incapable of attaining faith. After Bishop Sebastián Ramírez, President of the Real Audiencia of Mexico, called upon the Franciscans to write to the Emperor concerning the plight, ability, and Christianity of the natives, Minaya resolved to visit Cardinal Loaysa personally. Proceeding to Vera Cruz and having no provisions, he placed trust in the charity of his fellow passengers and embarked for Seville. Arriving in Spain, he walked from Seville to Valladolid and met with Cardinal Loaysa, who, rejecting Minaya’s pleas and disputations, disparagingly compared the indigenous to parrots. Angered and determined to appeal to the Pope, Minaya obtained from a member of the Council of the Indies a letter of introduction from the Empress to the Spanish Ambassador in Rome. Journeying on foot to the Holy See, Minaya succeeded in gaining Pope Paul III’s interest and obtained from him the letter “*Pastorale officium*” (29 May 1537) to Tavera, Cardinal of Toledo and the bull *Sublimis deus* (2 June 1537). “*Pastorale officium*” granted ecclesiastical power to excommunicate each and all, regardless of rank, who violated the Imperial edict prohibiting the enslavement or plundering of the native inhabitants of the Spanish territories in the New World. *Sublimis deus* declared all humans capable of partaking of the Highest Good and no human (including the “*Indios*” of the New World) is to be deprived of

¹⁷⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: The Gods*, p. 55. The Spanish conquistadors repeatedly referred to the New World indigenous as dogs. See: Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of New Spain*, vol. 2, pp. 244, 249; vol. 4, pp. 66-67, 147, 291. Cortes, *Letters of Cortes*, vol. 1, p. 321; vol. 2, pp. 76, 95. Yet depended on them for food and assistance.

¹⁷⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, p. 90.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-96.

¹⁷⁸ León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, pp. 226-28.

¹⁷⁹ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 60-68.

their liberty or possession of their property, even if they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ. Minaya personally brought these documents to the Emperor, Charles V, who confirmed them, and from there Minaya delivered and entrusted the documents to Juan de Tavera, Cardinal of Toledo, a trusted protector of the indigenous. To his surprise, within several months, Minaya was barred from further access to the pope regarding indigenous affairs, reprimanded for not submitting the papal documents to Cardinal Loaysa and the Council of the Indies for approval, banned by the Emperor from returning to the Indies, and imprisoned for two years. Further, Charles V obtained from Paul III the brief "*Non indecens videtur*" (19 June 1538) which nullified the permissions given in "*Pastorale officium*" and he evoked the new brief in support of the narrative that Paul III, having been misled and manipulated, revoked each and every bull and brief Friar Bernadino de Minaya had secured. Charles then ordered the Viceroy of New Spain to seize all copies of those documents. Meanwhile, upon release from confinement, Minaya's new assignment was to preach to the prisoners of the chancery in Valladolid.¹⁸⁰

Bernadino de Minaya's struggle demonstrates the Emperor managed and constrained the Pope and clergy not vice versa; the reluctance of the Emperor to impede his New World revenue stream and the associated economic development, despite the moral cost; and secular noncooperation in chastising and disciplining the baptized for abhorrent violations of Christ's teaching against the indigenous.¹⁸¹ It also exhibits that dedicated believers who assist and advocate for the oppressed are marginalized, suppressed, castigated, and discredited; the overpowered outgroup, even if peaceful, is victimized (its members becoming quarry); and Pizarro, who brings wealth to his associates and to the Crown through exploitation, is considered a hero worthy of adulation and emulation among the colonists. Is thus the golden rule naïve, incompatible with human nature? Let us consider the family. Is not a family in solidarity, caring for each other, working together, each contributing according to his/her ability and each receiving according to his/her need a great good? Is not a family arguing, fighting, injuring, and stealing from one another a dismal scandal and affliction? Is gaining a brother's property by overpowering and killing him a boon? Or forcing him to work to death in a mine that you may be enriched, is that a blessing? Would we rather live in a global society founded on subscription to a mutually beneficial code of conduct, respect, cooperation, and responsibility or an autocracy sustained by coercion, unquestioning obedience, dualism, opportunism, and war? Do we prefer a civilization of servants serving one another or a master – slave state? Is there a choice? Do not humans demonstrate the ability to bring practicable concepts into concrete existence?¹⁸²

In his address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, Pope Francis offered this apology in regard to Western colonialism:

¹⁸⁰ For a documented account of the Minaya affair, see: Hanke, "Pope Paul III and the American Indians", pp. 81-101. See also: Suess, *La Conquista Espiritual De La America Española*, 134-138.

¹⁸¹ The shepherds (Pope and clergy) did not in general resist the manipulations of the Emperor, which in effect allowed the continued exploitation of the indigenous peoples.

¹⁸² Consider: those who work together to create and build a house bring a concept into concrete existence as do those who create internet scams to mislead and exploit the vulnerable.

“I say this to you with regret: many grave sins were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God. My predecessors acknowledged this, CELAM, the Council of Latin American Bishops, has said it, and I too wish to say it. Like Saint John Paul II, I ask that the Church – I repeat what he said – ‘kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters’. I would also say, and here I wish to be quite clear, as was Saint John Paul II: I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the Church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America. Together with this request for forgiveness and in order to be just, I also would like us to remember the thousands of priests and bishops who strongly opposed the logic of the sword with the power of the Cross. There was sin, a great deal of it, for which we did not ask pardon. So for this, we ask forgiveness, I ask forgiveness.”¹⁸³

There was a precipitous collapse of empires in the 20th century,¹⁸⁴ yet, as of 2021, the United States was maintaining a reported 703 military bases of operation in 50 countries or territories outside her state boundaries.¹⁸⁵ Would the U.S. tolerate a foreign military installation within her borders? We thus observe Thucydides’ quote remains quite apposite: “the powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must.” Though categorization of contemporary political policy as colonialism has fallen into disfavor, yet do not power politics remain in play?

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for (my sake) will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?’”¹⁸⁶

Life feeds upon life. Life is fueled by sacrifice - including our own. Shall we offer our life in sacrifice at the altar of war, coercion, and spoil or of agape, solidarity, and peace?

Did the transatlantic slave trade manifest Christians total disregard for the suffering, agony, dehumanization, and abuse of others?

Christ did not capture, purchase, or keep slaves. He rather enjoined us to freely devote ourselves to the Father.¹⁸⁷ Yet within the historical and cultural context of First Century Mediterranean civilization, the Egyptians had slaves,¹⁸⁸ the Israelites had slaves,¹⁸⁹ the Persians had slaves,¹⁹⁰ the Greeks had slaves,¹⁹¹ the Romans had slaves,¹⁹² even Christians of the

¹⁸³ Pope Francis, *Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 9 July 2015, 3.2.

¹⁸⁴ See: Kinder and Hilgemann, *Penguin Atlas of World History*, vol. 2, p. 98; United Nations, “Non-Self-Governing Territories.”

¹⁸⁵ Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, “FY2022 Base Structure Report.”

¹⁸⁶ Matt 16:24-26 (New International Version – NIV) with slight revision based upon comparative examination of various translations.

¹⁸⁷ Mark 12:30; Matt 6:9-13; John 6:38.

¹⁸⁸ Exod 1:13.

¹⁸⁹ Deut 5:14, 20:10-14; Num 31:25-31; 1 Chr 5:18-21.

¹⁹⁰ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 7.5.73.

¹⁹¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1255a.

¹⁹² Livy, *The History of Rome*, 41.28.6-7; Siculus, Books 34/35.2.1-24a; *The Digest of Justinian*, 21.1.31.21

apostolic age had slaves.¹⁹³ And Pope Nicolaus V (1447-1455), following not the example of Christ (yet in accordance with ancient western tradition) conferred upon the Crown of Portugal “authority” to invade, capture, vanquish, subdue, dispossess, and perpetually enslave Saracens, pagans, and infidels within Africa – including right of possession and exclusive trade rights.¹⁹⁴ Was this an expansion of agape? Is not the longsuffering of the Holy Spirit demonstrated by the fact it took over 17 centuries before the conscience of substantial portions of Christendom began to recognize and acknowledge that “love your neighbor as yourself” applied to Black Peoples and mobilized to abolish slavery? Behavior reinforced by material gain, precedent, justificatory rationalizations, and self-interest can appear impervious to change, but - it would seem - violent oppression cannot continually quell the impulse against injustice.

Thus, does not a change in culture in the direction of agape imply a widespread shift in outlook and an extensive germination of empathy? Let us recognize some who, holding the law of agape as fundamental, challenged the status quo and effected advancement towards unity in solidarity. Granville Sharp (1735-1813), Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1845), the Anti-Slavery Society, and others collaborated together over the course of 46 years to mobilize public support and the GB/UK Parliament to first abolish and prohibit the slave trade in Africa, the West Indies, and the Americas to all subjects and residents of the British Empire (1807) and, finally, to abolish slavery throughout the Empire (1833).¹⁹⁵ Across the Atlantic, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), through his books, lectures, and activism in the abolitionist movement, raised awareness of the plight of Black slaves in the United States and continually sought reformation of societal practices inconsistent with agape - even after attainment of the 13th, 14th, & 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.¹⁹⁶ Abolition did not abolish the prejudice that rationalized justification of slavery in its former strongholds nor the outgroup status of Blacks. Charles Hamilton Houston (1895-1950) and Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993), relying on *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and the support of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, labored together to gain legal recognition that “Jim Crow” segregation practices did not fulfill the criterion of “Separate but Equal” and thus violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.¹⁹⁷ Rosa Parks (1913-2005), James Baldwin (1924-1987), Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress of Racial Equality, and numerous others helped establish, strengthen, and mobilize the Civil Rights Movement which confronted and exposed, in a nonviolent manner, the repulsive reality of “Jim Crow” racial oppression with the goal of leveraging repeal of legalized

¹⁹³ 1 Tim 6:1-2; Phlm 1:7-19.

¹⁹⁴ Nicolaus V: “*Dum diversas*”, 18 June 1452; “*Romanus pontifex*”, 8 January 1454.

¹⁹⁵ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, ch. 12. Clarkson, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: vol. 9, pp. 292-94; vol. 11, pp. 937-40; vol. 50, pp. 15-18; vol. 58, pp. 879-87. UK Parliament, “An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1807)”; “An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies (1833).”

¹⁹⁶ See: Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester; Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.

¹⁹⁷ James, *Root and Branch*.

racial discrimination and segregation.¹⁹⁸ The movement succeeded in effecting passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It may be said laws require force to be enforced and Christ did not use force. But a resolution reached by mutual agreement is not the same as a dictatorial imperative. Force is not needed if the parties involved honor their agreement or that reached by their representatives. Is not the obtaining of justice and resolving of differences by mutual consensus preferable to armed conflict or mutually detrimental noncooperation? Was not Christ sent to free the oppressed and bring justice to victory?¹⁹⁹

Pope John Paul II regarding the transatlantic slave trade:

“Gorée, ...symbol of the appalling error of those who reduced to slavery the brothers and sisters for whom the Gospel of freedom was intended...

The visit to the ‘house of slaves’ reminds us of this slave trade, which Pius II, writing in 1462 to a missionary bishop who was leaving for Guinea, described as an ‘enormous crime’, ‘*magnum scelus*’. For an entire period in the history of the African continent, black men, women and children were brought to this narrow ground, torn from their land, separated from their loved ones, to be sold as merchandise. They came from all regions and, chained, leaving for other skies, they kept as the last image of their native Africa the mass of basaltic rock of Gorée. We can say that this island remains in the memory and the heart of the entire black diaspora.

These men, women and children were victims of a shameful trade, in which people who were baptized but did not live their faith took part. How can we forget the enormous suffering inflicted, with disregard for the most basic human rights, on populations deported from the African continent? How can we forget the human lives annihilated by slavery?

It is fitting that this sin of man against man, this sin of man against God, be confessed in all truth and humility. How long is the road that the human family must travel before its members learn to see and respect each other as images of God, in order to finally love each other as sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father!

From this African sanctuary of black pain, we beg forgiveness from heaven. We pray that in the future the disciples of Christ will prove fully faithful to the observance of the commandment of brotherly love bequeathed by their Master. We pray that they will never again be oppressors of their brethren in any way, but always seek to imitate the compassion of the Good Samaritan of the Gospel by coming to the aid of those in need. We pray that the scourge of slavery and its aftereffects will disappear forever...”²⁰⁰

Though legalized slavery has been abolished, are workers well treated in our society? Can a community thrive if its base is neglected and exploited by profiteers? Is it not for pastors to lead the sheep to good pasture and defend them from predators?²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ See: Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son; Nobody Knows My Name, The Fire Next Time*. King, *Stride Towards Freedom: The Montgomery Story*; “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; “I Have a Dream.” Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years*.

¹⁹⁹ Exod 20:2; Luke 4:16-21; Isa 58:6; Matt 12:18-21; Heb 1:8-9.

²⁰⁰ John Paul II, *Speech to the Catholic Community of Gorée Island*, 22 February 1992, 1,3. Translation into English aided by Google Translate, ChatGPT, and DeepL.

²⁰¹ Cf. John 10:1-18, 21:15-17.

Did the Christian wars indicate that Christians condemn even themselves?

If unbroken apostolic lineage ensured perfect exemplification of Christ, should we not expect Christian communities to be united and settle their differences by peaceful means?²⁰²

Christ was a man of peace, he formed not armies but disciples²⁰³ – dying for the sake of love, not killing for it. Thus, let us look elsewhere for primeval conventions of war and civil war in Western tradition. We see Absalom incited a rebellion against his father King David, and a state of continual warfare existed between Rehoboam, King of Judah, and Jeroboam, King of Israel.²⁰⁴ The Romans violently overthrew and banished their King Lucius Tarquinius, and Sulla and his followers proscribed and slaughtered the faction of Marius.²⁰⁵ Caesar and his legions turned against those allied to his son in law (Pompey).²⁰⁶ The Lacedaemonians and their confederates prosecuted war against the Athenians, and the Macedonians razed Thebes.²⁰⁷ Baptized heads of State – preferring preeminence, dominion, and warfare to humility, solidarity, and peace; preferring the way of the Gentiles to that of Christ²⁰⁸ – perpetuated the ancient martial traditions (and in doing so pitted Christian against Christian). Thus, Edward III (1327-1377), King of England, sought to wrench France from his cousin and step uncle, Philip VI (1328-1350), taking the offensive and igniting the Hundred Years War.²⁰⁹ Thus Ferdinand II (1619-1637), Holy Roman Emperor, took umbrage with Frederick V (1610-1623) for accepting the Crown of Bohemia and determined force of arms against him, inaugurating the Thirty Years War.²¹⁰ Thus Emperor Franz Joseph (1848-1916) decided to exact vengeance upon the government and peoples of Serbia, after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofie, and evoked war (rather than pursue investigative collaboration and judicial, punitive proceedings against those involved in the crime) thereby destabilizing the balance of power in Europe and precipitating World War I.²¹¹

Tolstoy:

“The antagonism between life and the conscience may be removed in two ways: by a change of life or by a change of conscience. And there would seem there can be no doubt as to these alternatives.

A man may cease to do what he regards as wrong, but he cannot cease to consider wrong what is wrong. Just in the same way all humanity may cease to do what it regards as wrong, but far

²⁰² Cf. John 8:39, 17:20-23; Eph 2:11-18.

²⁰³ Matt 5:9; John 14:27; Rom 8:6; Matt 28:19-20.

²⁰⁴ 2 Sam 13:1-19:1; 1 Kings 11:26-14:31.

²⁰⁵ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.57-2.21; Appian, “The Civil Wars”, 1.55-104.

²⁰⁶ Appian, “The Civil Wars”, 2.1-154; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 40.56-43.42; Caesar, *The Civil Wars*.

²⁰⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.24-8.109; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 1.1.1-2.4.43; Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1.7-9.

²⁰⁸ Matt 20:25-28; Luke 14:7-11; Matt 6:12.

²⁰⁹ Perroy, *The Hundred Years War*, pp. 33-108.

²¹⁰ Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, pp. 69-108.

²¹¹ Meyer, *A World Undone*, pp. 3-87; “Austria's Ultimatum to Serbia,” *Current History*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Part I, pp. 554-558.

from being able to change, it cannot even retard for a time the continual growth of a clearer recognition of what is wrong and therefore ought not to be. And therefore it would seem inevitable for Christian men to abandon the pagan forms of society which they condemn, and to reconstruct their social existence on the Christian principles they profess.

So it would be were it not for the law of inertia, as immutable a force in men and nations as in inanimate bodies. In men it takes the form of the psychological principle, so truly expressed in the words of the Gospel, 'They have loved darkness better than light because their deeds were evil.' This principle shows itself in men not trying to recognize the truth, but to persuade themselves that the life they are leading, which is what they like and are used to, is a life perfectly consistent with truth.

Slavery was opposed to all the moral principles advocated by Plato and Aristotle, yet neither of them saw that, because to renounce slavery would have meant the break up of the life they were living. We see the same thing in our modern world.

... The majority, if not all, of the cultivated men of our day try unconsciously to maintain the old social conception of life, which justifies their position, and to hide from themselves and others its insufficiency...

... the specialty of [neo-Greco-Roman] government is not to obey, but to enforce obedience. And a [neo-Greco-Roman] government is only a government so long as it can make itself obeyed, and therefore it always strives for that and will never willingly abandon its power. But since it is on the army that the power of [neo-Greco-Roman] government rests, it will never give up the army, and the use of the army in war.

... Justice can have no binding force on a ruler or rulers who keep men, deluded and drilled in readiness for acts of violence—soldiers, and by means of them control others. And so, [neo-Greco-Roman] governments can never be brought to consent to diminish the number of these drilled slaves, who constitute their whole power and importance.

... 'The most bewildering thing is that the whole of society is not in revolt at the word war... The nations are coming to understand that the magnitude of a crime cannot be its extenuation; that if killing is a crime, killing many can be no extenuating circumstance; that if robbery is disgraceful, invasion cannot be glorious. Ah! let us proclaim these absolute truths; let us dishonor war!... No one has an absolute right to govern others. It ought only to be done for the benefit of those who are governed. And it is as much the duty of anyone who governs to avoid war as it is the duty of a captain of a ship to avoid shipwreck.'"²¹²

War discards Christ's command to love your neighbor as yourself and thus dislodges the Christian moral foundation. It traps the masses in a gladiatorial situation. It brings hell to earth, unleashing demonic depravity. It massacres millions in a lawless orgy of murder and blood. It maims, incinerates, bludgeons, rapes. It destroys communities, prosperity, cultural treasures, thriving enterprises, loving relationships. It poisons, devastates, and makes barren the land. It creates famine and disease and gives birth to untold misery, terror, and confusion. It rages against the Creator through wholesale destruction of living beings and their habitat. It spoils the fruit of love, cooperation, and labor and overshadows the land in darkness and devastation. It

²¹² Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, ch. 6. Tolstoy's inner quotation from Maupassant, *Sur l'eau*.

demonstrates humanity has yet to overcome its savage propensities, that the baptized are, for the most part, not fully converted.

Christ offers a way to navigate around war:

- We are to love GOD with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength – thus we are to recognize and acknowledge GOD, the Father, the Source and Sustainer of Life to whom each of us owe our very existence, and, in thanksgiving, offer ourselves in service to GOD and to life: nurturing and cultivating GOD’s creation, not destroying it.²¹³ Further, the Father stands as the ultimate authority to which conscience may appeal when facing coercive pressure to disregard a moral imperative.
- We are to love our neighbor as ourself – thus seek the good of others as we do for ourselves.²¹⁴ War is a form of mutual self-destruction.
- We are not to take oaths – thus not afford others opportunity to demand of us blind obedience and thereby subvert and supplant our fundamental duty toward GOD, toward neighbor, and conscience.²¹⁵
- We are not to set ourselves against those who act as an enemy – in such cases, be not vindictive but humble, patient, even magnanimous.²¹⁶
- We are to love those hostile to us – be not baited into hostility by means of hostility but overcome hostility by means of love (agape).²¹⁷
- We are to be peacemakers – seek common ground, common good, and reconciliation.²¹⁸

Is the exchange of one’s moral compass for nefarious gain (trafficking in murder and devastation on behalf of an ingroup) a worthwhile trade?

Though as a society we have yet to vanquish war, there are examples of its being circumvented.

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), influenced by Jainism (as taught by Shrimad Rajchandra), the Gospels of Jesus Christ, Leo Tolstoy’s Christian philosophic works, the meekness of his wife, Kasturba, and others, conceived a nonviolent approach for obtaining justice and resolving differences – Satyagraha - whereby the oppressed firmly resolve, with dedication not less than militants, to unite in nonhostile noncompliance to prejudicial ordinances and engage in dialog

²¹³ Cf. Gen 2:15; Lev 25:23, Rev 11:18.

²¹⁴ Matt 7:12; Jas 2:8.

²¹⁵ Matt 5:33-37 (see *Interlinear Bible*). Adolf Hitler imposed oaths of obedience to himself upon the officers and members of the armed forces, teachers and professors, and even the youth. In fact, it is recorded the vast majority of the German Protestant clergy submitted to the oath of allegiance to Hitler. See: Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 226-27, 239, 249, 253.

²¹⁶ Matt 5:38-42.

²¹⁷ Matt 5:43-48; Rom 12:21.

²¹⁸ Matt 5:9.

towards redress with regime officials until acceptable conditions are obtained.²¹⁹ Gandhi's Satyagraha movement, relying not on troops or terrorists, helped open the way to bilateral discussion and governmental transition in India's struggle for liberation from British rule. Satyagraha was also effectively adopted by the American Civil Rights Movement in their campaign to end segregation.²²⁰

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) used his renown and influence to communicate, reason, and plead with international leaders and the general public (through the press) in an attempt to uphold rationality and contemplation of the overall destructive consequences of war rather than allow martial pride and bravado free rein to escalate into possible nuclear conflict. His appeals to reason, human solidarity, and the common good likely helped defuse the eruption of war in both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962.²²¹

Though neither Gandhi nor Bertrand Russell were professed Christians, were not their actions in regard to the avoidance of armed conflict consonant with the precept: Love your neighbor as yourself? Does not Christ's blessing apply to them: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."?²²²

Pope Paul VI addressing the United Nations on war:

"Never again one against the other, never, never again!... It is enough to recall that the blood of millions, countless unheard-of sufferings, useless massacres and frightening ruins have sanctioned the agreement that unites you with an oath that ought to change the future history of the world: never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, that has to guide the destiny of the nations of all mankind!"²²³

Pope John Paul II:

"The battle for peace is always a battle for life!... 'NO TO WAR'! War is never inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between States, the noble exercise of diplomacy: these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences."²²⁴

To treat someone as an enemy is to make an enemy of yourself. It is recorded Romulus (co-founder of Rome) slew his own brother to obtain civic predominance.²²⁵ But those called to the Kingdom of the Father lay down their lives for the sake of their brothers, neighbors, friends.²²⁶

²¹⁹ Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, pt. 1, ch.20; pt.2 ch. 1, 15, 22. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, ch. 10-13. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Vol. 68*, ch. 49.

²²⁰ See: Guha, *Gandhi: The Years that Changed the World*; King, *Stride Toward Freedom*; Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years*.

²²¹ Russell, *Unarmed Victory*.

²²² Matt 5:9.

²²³ Paul VI, *Address of the Holy Father Paul VI to the United Nations Organization*, 4 October 1965.

²²⁴ John Paul II, *Address of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps*, 13 January 2003, pars. 3, 4. The Italian and Spanish transcripts of the speech were also consulted to discern the most accurate English translation.

²²⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1.85-87; Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.6.3-1.7.3.

²²⁶ Cf. John 15:12-13.

Did the Holocaust attest to the absolute hypocrisy of Christians? Did it verify their utter disdain for the life of others, for justice, for agape?

Who will dare stand against the warmonger, the vilifying demagogue, the malevolent manipulator (exploiter of vices and vulnerabilities), whose power resides in lawless ambition, shameless daring, rapacious associates, mass deception, homicide, plunder, terror, and intimidation? When will we learn not to obey (in evil) the destroyer, who holds captive all who refuse to not comply and victimizes those who do? Where were the shepherds when the Nazi legions compelled the flocks to cooperate in the pillage, banishment, and extermination of the Jewish peoples? Can a nation or people be considered Christian if it allows itself to be led by an unrelenting provocateur of atrocity and murder - if it collaborates with him in genocide? If power resides with the people, when will the people hold their officials in check rather than cooperate in manifest evil? The Holocaust glaringly revealed to the world a lacuna in faithfulness and devotion, among the baptized, to the Covenant and to Christ when tested in the crucible. Was it not a sign from GOD – a warning and clear call to repentance? A mirror which discloses us to ourselves? Should we despair? Or learn and repent? Is it not for the baptized to place service to GOD above all else? - to recognize GOD, not self, as the Center of All? If Christ is the Light, then agape is the way: under GOD, we are not obligated to obey orders which violate the principles of agape. Should we not rather lay down our life than become party to mass murder?

Thus, is it not incumbent upon the baptized to:

Nurture and foster metanoia?

Strive to develop and strengthen conscience to the point where it is capable of “drawing a line” and of refusing to participate in acts clearly at variance with agape?

Cultivate critical thinking and the art of balancing and harmonizing obedience to GOD and to human authority?

Learn to recognize dehumanizing rhetoric and tactics and understand and disarm their effect?

Be ready to face and endure persecution?

If we love GOD with our whole heart, if we are dedicated to love our neighbor as ourself, if we strive to discern motives and outcomes of directives, who can oblige us to forsake conscience and pillage and exterminate our neighbors? History reveals - the Holocaust especially – that blind obedience enables lawless persons to preside over unspeakable acts of evil. Yet, if each person is responsible before GOD for his or her actions, then each person has personal agency. The Light of Christ reveals the Way of the eternal Father, which enables appeal to a higher authority and releases us from obligation to blind obedience to tyranny. We are not slaves to evil. To function, society requires cooperation, but we are not obliged to cooperate in senseless

destruction. “You shall not murder.”²²⁷ “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These principles provide a basis for solidarity against injustice and the prejudicial slaughter of fellow humans.

Christ was not/is not a murdering racist. He did not commit nor compel homicide. His concern was spirit not flesh.²²⁸ According to the Gospel, are not the spiritual Israelites those who do the will of the heavenly Father: love one another as Christ has loved us?²²⁹ Antecedent exemplars, in Western culture, of the eradication of a cultural group or entity are found, among others, in accounts of the annihilation of Jericho by the Israelites, the destruction of Thebes by the forces of Alexander, and the obliteration of Carthage and Corinth by the Romans.²³⁰

Thus, when baptized Roman Emperors enacted coercive and intimidatory measures against dissident religious groups, they perpetuated ancient Western and Roman tradition but departed from the example of Christ. Arcadius and Honorius officially decreed (22 February 407):

“We persecute the Manichaeans and Donatists, whether men or women, with perfectly warranted severity. This manner of people shall have nothing whatsoever, whether by custom or by law, in common with the rest of mankind. And first of all, We want it (adherence to the Manichaeans or Donatists) to be a public crime, because wrongs committed with respect to divine religion are to the detriment of all. We persecute them indeed by the confiscation of their property... We also desire that they be prohibited from every gift and inheritance, from whatever source it may come. Furthermore, We leave no one who has been convicted the power to give, buy, sell, or even make a contract. The inquisition shall be extended against death (i.e., against the dead). For if it is permissible to impeach the memory of the deceased with accusations of treason, one shall not undeservedly undergo judgment in this case too.”²³¹

Theodosius II and Valentinian III went even further (30 May 428):

“The Manichaeans shall be expelled from the cities and delivered up to capital punishment, for there must be no place left them in which they might do insult to the very elements.”²³²

Hence, edicts, enacted by baptized Emperors, mandating the pillage, banishment, and extermination of the Manicheans preceded the Holocaust by 1500 years and provided it precedent.

The gospel passage:

“When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s

²²⁷ Matt 19:18 NIV; Mark 10:19 NIV; Luke 18:20 NIV.

²²⁸ John 3:5-6, 6:63.

²²⁹ Cf. Matt 2:6, 12:46-50, 15:24; John 4:23-24, 13:34-35.

²³⁰ Josh 1-6; Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1.7-9; Appian, *“The Punic Wars”*, pars. 69-135; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 7.13-16; Dio, *Roman History*, 21.72.

²³¹ *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.5.4.

²³² *Ibid.*, 1.5.5.

blood. Look to it yourselves.’ And the whole people said in reply, ‘His blood be upon us and upon our children.’”²³³

Instead of focusing on the paschal implications of this passage, it and other passages were used by many baptized exegetes over the centuries as imprecations against the Jewish People.²³⁴ Yet are not all rejections of love rejections of Christ?²³⁵ So who has not contributed to His crucifixion? Yet among the baptized, Jews were stigmatized as Christ killers and normatively ostracized. Jews were not allowed to marry Christians nor hold public office and their possessions were subject to arbitrary confiscation.²³⁶ Jews who converted yet retained their cultural traditions fell under the shadow of the Inquisition.²³⁷ Those who refused baptism were expelled from England, France, Austria, Spain, Sicily, Portugal, Naples, the Papal States (except Rome and Ancona), even Russia.²³⁸ They faced incessant persecution as an outgroup throughout Christian Europe.²³⁹ Thus Hitler found them an isolated and vulnerable target for scapegoating, predation, and destruction in his project to subjugate, depopulate, and colonize Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and eliminate and extirpate the cult of YHWH.²⁴⁰

In light of how so called “Christendom” has treated persons, groups, and societies of divergent beliefs, culture, and physical complexion; what tangible benefit of baptism is evident to those not baptized? If we, the baptized, have not love for others, then do we not appear as enemies to the non-baptized and even to Christ?²⁴¹ Eighty years after the Holocaust, it is still regarded as acceptable in Western society for news outlets and public officials to employ Nazi style propaganda and dehumanization tactics: publicly dehumanize, demonize, and attack targeted outgroups in order to rouse and mobilize the public. In fact, it is a plague in our very midst with demagogues currently seeking to rally citizens against fellow citizens and neighbors. The reemergence of lawlessness as occurred in the 20th century around the wakes of cults of personality in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union is currently a disastrous possibility. The Holocaust provides a signal example of how effectively and thoroughly humans can be induced

²³³ Matt 27:24-25.

²³⁴ Paschal implications: cf. Exod 12; Lev 17:11; Matt 26:28; Heb 9:22; Rom 11:25-36. Denunciations: Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 4.27.25; Chrysostom, “*Adversus Judæos Orationes*”, a.k.a. *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*; Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: St. Matthew*, 27.25. See: Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, ch.3; Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*.

²³⁵ Cf. John 15:12; Matt 25:45.

²³⁶ *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.9.6, 1.9.18; Aquinas, *Letter to Margaret of Flanders*, art. 1. Cf. Bethencourt, *The Inquisition*, pp. 370-72.

²³⁷ Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, pp. 133-39; Bethencourt, *The Inquisition*, pp. 368-74.

²³⁸ Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, ch. 4. Charles VI, “Lettres qui portent”, 17 September 1394; “L’Exécutoire”, 17 September 1394. *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, bk.14, ch.17. Krauss, *Die Wiener Geserah vom Jahre 1421*. The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Sicily”, Vol.11, pp. 325-26. Encyclopedia Judaica, 2nd ed., s.v. “Portugal”, vol. 16, pp. 410-412; “Naples”, vol. 14, p. 776; “Russia”, vol. 17, p. 532. Pius V, *Hebraeorum gens*, 26 February 1569.

²³⁹ Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, pp. 139-204.

²⁴⁰ Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. Cameron and Stevens, *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941-1944*, sec. 33, 39. Overy, *The Dictator’s: Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia*, pp. 285-88. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 82-84.

²⁴¹ Matt 3:8-10, 7:21-23, 21:42-43.

to disengage from moral norms and mobilized to ingloriously, ruthlessly, and murderously set upon a dehumanized (though nonviolent and socially contributory) group. Should not those seriously dedicated to Christ desist from collaboration in such activity? Should not the baptized work together and train to recognize, counter, and defuse patent dehumanization tactics: the public scapegoating of a target group, the triggering of deep-seated prejudices and resentment, the use of sweeping denigrating and dehumanizing generalizations, the fomentation of hostility and intolerance, the mobilization of the ingroup against the outgroup culminating in homicidal assault?²⁴²

Some might say, 'No training is needed to know when someone is being singled out for ill treatment. Fear of facing like treatment or of ostracization is what silences objection and compels compliance - especially if governmental authority sponsors the aggression. The more merciless the abuse of the target group, the more vehement the compliance (to authority) among the perpetrating group. Who would not cooperate in prejudicial discrimination, exploitation, and murder in order to avoid like treatment?'

If such be the case, are we living in a Christian society? Who is willing and prepared to stand with Christ?

Thankfully there were deviations from unquestioning obedience to Nazi directives during the Holocaust. Some Christians and others helped save Jewish lives while facing the peril of lethal, repercussive retaliation. In appreciation, the State of Israel, as of 1 January 2022, has honored 28,217 non-Jewish individuals and bestowed on them the title: "Righteous Among the Nations." A few examples:

During the operation to deport the Jews from the Wloszczowa ghetto²⁴³ to the Treblinka extermination camp, Aryeh Beclowicz, his brother Jacob, and sister Miriam escaped into town and sought assistance from an acquaintance of their parents, Aniela Baba. Though also living with her daughter, Aniela provided refuge for the three siblings in her attic and supplied their needs for over two years until the town was liberated from the Nazi terror.²⁴⁴

With the progressing collapse of the Nazi front in January 1945, Fryda Kronman, an inmate of the Toruń concentration camp,²⁴⁵ was forced to participate in an evacuation march under harsh winter conditions. Observing how her fellow marchers were shot and left for dead at the first sign of weakness, Fryda determined to push on despite frozen feet and ebbing strength. At night, the prisoners were assigned to sleep in barns and sheds on local farms. One night, Fryda burrowed under some hay and decided she would not continue the march. The next morning, she lay still as the guards stabbed the hay with their bayonets. After the prison brigade departed, Fryda emerged from the barn and asked some children for help. The children ran off

²⁴² See: Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*; Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 11th ed., pp. 13-353; Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, pp. 3-169; Newman and Erber, *Understanding Genocide*.

²⁴³ Wloszczowa (50°51'15"N, 19°58'1"E).

²⁴⁴ Bender and Krakowski, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Poland*, p. 63.

²⁴⁵ Toruń (53°01'20"N, 18°36'40"E).

instead - apparently to summon the police. Another young girl, Waleria Jezeczek, who observed the incident, told Fryda to quickly follow her. Injured and suffering greatly from pain, Fryda managed to follow Waleria to her parent's home. Waleria's parents allowed her to bandage Fryda's feet and furtively summon a doctor. It was understood Fryda was to stay only a few days, but Waleria convinced her parents and family not to turn her out. Thus, Fryda remained with the Jezeczek family until the area was liberated from Nazi occupation.²⁴⁶

Stefan Konopka supervised repair of war damaged public buildings in Warsaw. During January 1943, Stefan hid Leon Krotowski in his apartment, obtained for him forged documents, faithfully provided for his needs, and treated him like a member of the family. Leon stayed with Stefan until the inhabitants of Warsaw were forced from the city due to the suppression of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Stefan then brought Leon with him to a village near Sochaczew and passed him off as a relative - despite Leon's prominent Jewish attributes. Both were arrested however and sent to the Pruszków transit camp, Dulag 121. Stefan and Leon managed to escape the camp and found a hiding place, where they resided until the Nazi forces were expelled by the Red Army.²⁴⁷

It must be acknowledged the Allied Forces were crucial in subduing the Nazi Terror. Yet how many communities preserved, slayings averted; how much devastation prevented, prosperity maintained if the German baptized had refused assent to Hitler's projects of race war and genocide?

Was not the immolation of the Jews in the very midst of "Christian" Europe a type of crucifixion? A mass martyrdom? A participation and sharing in the sufferings of Christ? Are not the victims of injustice and persecution more Christlike than the perpetrators? By sharing in His death will they not also share in His Life?²⁴⁸ Will their deaths bring purification: serve to open our eyes to the hideous evil to which even the baptized are capable when justice and agape toward all (including outgroups) are not pursued, upheld, and preserved?

The Roman Catholic Church has initiated steps towards cultural conversion and reconciliation.

Pope John Paul II to the Jewish community of Alsace, France:

"Therefore, in deep fidelity to the vocation to which the God of peace and justice calls us – and with us, all the peoples of Europe – I repeat with you again the strongest condemnation of all anti-Semitism and all racism, which are opposed to the principles of Christianity, and for which there is no justification in the cultures that want to refer to them. For the same reasons, we must reject any religious prejudice that history has shown us to be inspired by anti-Semitic stereotypes, or contradicting the dignity of every person."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Bender and Krakowski, *Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Poland*, p. 313.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 369.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Rom 6:4-11.

²⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Meeting with the Representatives of the Jewish Community of Alsace in Strasbourg*, 9 October 1988, par. 8. Translation from French by Google Bard.

Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome:

"3. ...Certainly, we cannot and should not forget that the historical circumstances of the past were very different from those that have laboriously matured over the centuries. The general acceptance of a legitimate plurality on the social, civil and religious levels has been arrived at with great difficulty. Nevertheless, a consideration of centuries-long cultural conditioning could not prevent us from recognizing that the acts of discrimination, unjustified limitation of religious freedom, oppression also on the level of civil freedom in regard to the Jews were, from an objective point of view, gravely deplorable manifestations. Yes, once again, through myself, the Church, in the words of the well-known Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (no. 4), 'deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and by anyone;' I repeat: 'by anyone.'

I would like once more to express a word of abhorrence for the genocide decreed against the Jewish people during the last War, which led to the holocaust of millions of innocent victims...

4. Today's visit is meant to make a decisive contribution to the consolidation of the good relations between our two communities, in imitation of the example of so many men and women who have worked and who are still working today, on both sides, to overcome old prejudices and to secure ever wider and fuller recognition of that 'bond' and that 'common spiritual patrimony' that exists between Jews and Christians.

This is the hope expressed in the fourth paragraph of the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which I have just mentioned, on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. The decisive turning-point in relations between the Catholic Church and Judaism, and with individual Jews, was occasioned by this brief but incisive paragraph.

We are all aware that, among the riches of this paragraph no. 4 of *Nostra Aetate*, three points are especially relevant. I would like to underline them here, before you, in this truly unique circumstance. The first is that the Church of Christ discovers her 'bond' with Judaism by 'searching into her own mystery' (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, *ibid.*) The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.

The second point noted by the Council is that no ancestral or collective blame can be imputed to the Jews as a people for 'what happened in Christ's passion' (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, *ibid.*): not indiscriminately to the Jews of that time, nor to those who came afterwards, nor to those of today. So any alleged theological justification for discriminatory measures or, worse still, for acts of persecution is unfounded. The Lord will judge each one 'according to his own works,' Jews and Christians alike (cf. Rom 2:6).

The third point that I would like to emphasize in the Council's Declaration is a consequence of the second. Notwithstanding the Church's awareness of her own identity, it is not lawful to say that the Jews are 'repudiated or cursed,' as if this were taught or could be deduced from the Sacred Scriptures of the Old or the New Testament (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, *ibid.*). Indeed, the Council had already said in this same text of *Nostra Aetate*, but also in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16, referring to Saint Paul in the *Letter to the Romans* (11:28-29), that the Jews are beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable calling.

5. On these convictions rest our present relations. On the occasion of this visit to your Synagogue, I wish to reaffirm them and to proclaim them in their perennial value... Furthermore,

it is necessary to say that the path undertaken is still at the beginning, and therefore a considerable amount of time will still be needed, notwithstanding the great efforts already made on both sides, to remove all forms of prejudice, even subtle ones, to readjust every manner of self-expression and therefore to present always and everywhere, to ourselves and to others, the true face of the Jews and of Judaism, as likewise of Christians and of Christianity, and this at every level of outlook, teaching and communication.”²⁵⁰

To the Jewish community of Budapest, Hungary:

“4. Our gaze now turns from the past to a future of reconciliation in justice. Once again I deplore and condemn, together with you, the wickedness which made you suffer and which brought about the death of so many others. Of course we must try to ‘purge the evil from our midst’ (cf. Deut. 17:7), but what concerns us now is not desire for revenge on the wicked, since it is fitting to leave the supreme judgment to God, but a commitment to ensure that never again can selfishness and hatred sow suffering and death. We must ensure that justice reigns at least in that part of the world over which we can exercise a certain influence, beginning in the first place with our own hearts, our families and those who are close to us.

...The hard quest for justice, love and peace must begin with ourselves. It would be a mistake to think that the dark force of selfishness and hatred remains totally outside our lives...”²⁵¹

Paweł Włodkowic:

“Where power is more at work than love, people seek their own interests and not those of Jesus Christ, and accordingly they easily depart from the rule of God's law... All the kinds of law are against those who threaten people wishing to live in peace: against them is the civil law... the canon law... the natural law, expressed in the principle 'Do to others what you would have done to you'. Against them is the divine law, in that... the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal' forbids all robbery, and the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' forbids all violence.”²⁵²

The Holocaust bears siren witness to the maniacal, demonic degeneracy humans – including the baptized - are capable while under obedience to a regime pursuing total war. In contrast, the way of Christ is benevolent concern and compassion.²⁵³ Christ came not to consign us to oblivion but to manifest the way of the Father, the way of love.²⁵⁴ Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves not remove their neighbors from themselves. The Holocaust demonstrates that commitment to Christ requires we pursue agape with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength – even and especially in the face of death.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome*, 13 April 1986. Italian version of the address may be found in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 78, pp. 1117-23.

²⁵¹ John Paul II, *Address to Representatives of the Jewish Community*, 18 August 1991.

²⁵² Paweł Włodkowic, “*Saevientibus*” [1415], Tract. II, Solutio quaest. 4a; cf. L. Ehrlich, “Pisma wybrane Pawła Włodkowica”, Warszawa 1968, t. 1, p. 61; pp. 58-59. Quote and reference extracted from John Paul II, *Homily at Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 7 June 1979, par. 3.

²⁵³ Cf. Matt 9:13; Luke 10:25-37, 19:10.

²⁵⁴ Matt 16:24; John 8:12, 14:23.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Rev 12:11.

Are Christians blind to harm they have inflicted? Do they refuse to admit wrong? Do they claim infallibility?

If we view our neighbor as another self and unwittingly harmed them: we would empathize, be filled with contrition, and immediately seek to remedy the situation. As demonstrated above, the history of the society of the baptized is replete with horrific abuse and extermination of our neighbors. Yet how are we seeking to repent, reform, and heal the breach? Are we striving to discover where we went wrong? What needs to change in order avoid similar future outcomes? Are we reconciling with the injured? If not, how can we be following Christ? Does not one who refuses to admit wrong also refuse to acknowledge harm inflicted? Who but GOD is incapable of error?²⁵⁶ It is through facing our errors, acknowledging, repenting, and learning from them that, with the aid of mercy and grace, wounds are healed, trust regained, peace and communion restored. Thus, may we advance in the art of love and life. How can we unite with Christ and the Father if we refuse to recognize when we transgress the Covenant?²⁵⁷ How can there be reconciliation with the injured if we remain unwilling to acknowledge our transgressions and the resultant harm induced? To lead people to Love we must follow the Way of Love.²⁵⁸ Shall we say, "I am with GOD and GOD is with me so I am free from sin"?²⁵⁹ Are we united to Christ and the Holy Spirit when our intentional acts are contrary to agape?²⁶⁰ Are we following Christ when we despise and avoid, malign and kill, torture and coerce, murder and plunder, enslave and objectify, engage in fratricide and genocide (against) those who have differing views, customs, and traditions than us? Many may say: "I don't do those things." Do we not do the same things, when, upon a pretext, a nation or group is publicly demonized and we willingly join together in turning against it? Cooperate in assaulting it? Obey patently unjust directives to the destruction of fellow humans and the common good? If we refuse to learn the lesson of the Holocaust, of murderous prejudice and bigotry, we consent to its normalization. Let us not be blind to the horrors of the past or the present. Let us be willing to recognize, admit, and decry against harm and injustice and repent of behavior and attitudes antithetical to agape. Have not the grave and multitudinous crimes of the baptized discredited, in the eyes of very many, the credibility of the Christian Church? Is it not the responsibility of the faithful to reprove grave transgression and refuse cooperation in its commission or advance?²⁶¹ If Christ is Truth, then to oppose inherent truth, to act in opposition to fundamental reality, is to educe failure and ruin. Shall we not repent and return to Christ, who despises not a humble and contrite heart?²⁶²

²⁵⁶ Cf. Rom 3:23; Mark 10:18

²⁵⁷ Cf. Prov 28:13; Luke 22:15-20; John 13:34-35, 15:12-17; Eph 4:15.

²⁵⁸ Matt 10:38-29, 16:24-27; John 8:12.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Rom 8:31; 1 John 3:9.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Matt 25:31-46; 1 John 3:10.

²⁶¹ Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4; Lev 19:17; Exod 23:1-2; Ps 1:1; Prov 1:8-19; Sir 19:13-17; Ezek 3:17-21, 33:1-9; Acts 5:29; Eph 5:11; 1 Tim 5:20; Jer 6:17-19.

²⁶² Cf. Ps 51:19 NJPS; Isa 55.

Moreover, is it not pretentious and folly for a group woefully unable to maintain discipline among its members to claim infallibility?²⁶³ Only GOD is infallible: Magisterium resides in the Father, Logos, and Holy Spirit.²⁶⁴ If Christ is Logos (Word), then Christ is capable of fully grasping objective Truth and instructing, guiding, and shepherding humans along the path of Life.²⁶⁵ Thus, when we act in accordance with agape, we are being true to our calling and united in spirit with Christ.²⁶⁶ Love avoids offense; love does not intentionally harm; love is self-sacrificing, it imparts life; it is not arrogant, vindictive, or grasping; love is a force that unites; thus love (agape) may be considered an infallible pursuit.²⁶⁷

Agape may unite us to GOD but it is GOD who is Infallible - the disciple may often miss the mark.²⁶⁸ GOD's Word is spirit. When we receive His Word, internalize it, contemplate it, apply it; His Spirit unites with our spirit. We allow Him to move and direct us. His instruction is agape; His directive is agape. Agape is the communal link between GOD and human. To depart from agape is to disunite in spirit with GOD.²⁶⁹ Thus, if agape is lacking in a human endeavor, how can we expect inerrancy? Yet, who can claim perfect comprehension of GOD's Word or perfect praxis of love? Must we not acknowledge our humble status? Just as in science a theory may appear reasonable but prove inaccurate. So too an ecclesial decree or custom may have a basis in a scriptural interpretation yet prove discordant with agape. How can we know if we are interpreting correctly? The fruit arising from the application of our interpretation of the Word in daily life should accord with the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.²⁷⁰ If instead we participate in engendering detestation, desolation, chaos, rage, savagery, covetousness, perfidiousness, violence, lawlessness, will we not reap what we sow?²⁷¹ Shall not our spirit taste and discern either the excellent or vile fruit of our works? Though I dedicate myself to following Christ's word that does not mean I am always successful. Humans are fallible, stubborn, impulsive, tribal. And does not attributing infallibility to fallible persons or human institutions lead to the refusal of acknowledgment of wrongs - thus obstructing repentance, spiritual growth, reconciliation, and even agape itself? Does not the assertion of inerrancy form a bulwark of invulnerability: nullifying recognition of self in others; quashing admonition; and obviating critique, debate, multilateral solidarity and cooperation? Does it not cut off intellectual and ethical inquiry and subvert the pursuit of truth by cultivating unquestioning adherence to the established narrative? We have demonstrated various mass movements wherein departure from agape towards outgroups and even each other becomes normalized among the baptized. Has not unquestioning obedience to office holders often proven morally (and physically) disastrous for

²⁶³ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 18, 25.

²⁶⁴ Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; Pss (NJPS) 18:31-32, 19:8-12, 103:19; Dan 2:20-22, 7:13-14; Matt 23:8-12, 28:18; Col 1:15-18.

²⁶⁵ John 1:1, 14, 17-18. Nicene Creed. 1 John 4:7-8. Matt 25:31-46. John 14:6; 10:1-18, 24-30.

²⁶⁶ John 8:31-32; 14:15-17, 21; 15:9-14, 17; 17:17.

²⁶⁷ Cf. John 10:10-11; 1 Cor 13; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14.

²⁶⁸ Matt 10:24-25; Luke 6:40; John 13:13-17.

²⁶⁹ Wis 1:5 (Biblia Sacra Vulgata - BSV); Sir 34:14-34 (BSV); Prov 11:20, 15:8-9, 21:21, 27; Isa 1:11-20; Luke 13:1-9, 14:27-33.

²⁷⁰ Gal 5:22-23; 1 Thess 5:21.

²⁷¹ Gal 6:7-8; Matt 18:6-9; Luke 17:1-4.

Christendom? Does not trust in the claim to inerrancy create a cultural norm exploited by megalomaniacs who by means of deception, corruption, and terror maintain a loyal group in a state of delusion and fear whom may be manipulated and mobilized at will against fellow humans?

In contrast, Christ did not impose obedience. He led by admonition, forewarning, instruction, love and example. He presented his teaching as truth but did not compel assent – thus allowing room for debate, discussion, independence: for free will to taste, experience, and consider the fruit of his word and works.²⁷² Though humans do not have the capacity to fully grasp the mind of GOD,²⁷³ GOD is able to reveal what is necessary. The Light enables those who seek to find the way.²⁷⁴ The Holy Spirit is sent to guide us to all truth as we are able to understand and bear it and willing to acknowledge and follow it.²⁷⁵ It is an ongoing process. Since human understanding is incomplete, fallible; doctrine is not immutable - it develops and advances.²⁷⁶ Compulsion to unquestioningly comply and obey is the practice of slave masters. Christ allows us to freedom to learn and grow, to taste through experience His verity and goodness, to assent to or ignore or reject his herald's call to repentance and communion.²⁷⁷ From where derived ecclesial divergence from the exemplar of Christ's meekness and humility?²⁷⁸ We find precedent in ancient Roman tradition.

From the beginning of the Roman Empire, the Emperors were vested with *Imperium*: supreme, unimpeachable authority over the community (realm); the unfettered power to command, institute and interpret law, and exact obedience - including use of lethal force.²⁷⁹ Such veneration did the Romans afford the emperors, they placed self-sacrificing faith in the competence of the Emperor to direct the State. In 380 CE, the Roman Emperor Theodosius established the Catholic Christian religion as the State religion.²⁸⁰ In 533, Justinian proclaimed the Pope of Rome to be head of the priests of GOD and of the State Church, thus bestowing on the papacy *auctoritas* (authority and status) akin to *patria potestas* (autocratic paterfamilias

²⁷² Rev 3:20; Matt 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10.

²⁷³ Isa 55:8-9.

²⁷⁴ Cf. John 8:12; Matt 7:7-8.

²⁷⁵ John 16:12-13; cf. Rev 7:17.

²⁷⁶ Regarding innovation: From the *allocutio* of the Council of Chalcedon to the Emperor Marcian: "...let no one venture to say, in order to avoid the refutation of his error, that the letter of Leo is contrary to the canons, since it is not allowed to set up a different confession of faith from the Nicene. The latter is certainly sufficient for the faithful, but those who endeavor to destroy the faith must be opposed and their objections must be suitably met, not in order to add anything new to the Nicene faith, but in order to refute the innovations of heretics." (Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. 3, sec. 193, p. 351.). Please interpret "heretic" as a person of differing school or conviction. Was not Christ considered a false teacher by the religious establishment of his community? See also: Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*; Sir 51:26.

²⁷⁷ Mark 1:15; John 14:15, 21, 23-24; Gal 4:26; 2 Cor 3:17. The words of Christ are like that of a herald: Matt 7:24-26; John 12:44-50; cf. Deut 18:15-22.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Matt 5:3,5; 11:28-30.

²⁷⁹ *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. s.v. "imperium." *The Digest of Justinian*, 1.4.1. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 53.2-19, 54.10. How was the obedience exacted by the Emperors different in kind from that exacted by the Pharaohs (of *Exodus*) in Egypt?

²⁸⁰ *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.1.1.

power) over the State Church.²⁸¹ Thus, the Pope came to be regarded by Western canonists as possessing sovereign authority over Christendom (including Christian emperors, kings, and fellow bishops); and as primatial Vicar of Christ (since Christ was regarded as LORD of All), the *potestas* of the Pope (*plenitudo potestatis*) came to be viewed as surpassing and encompassing even the *Imperium* of the Emperor.²⁸² Hence, the Papacy was held to hold unimpeachable authority in regard to all humanity.²⁸³ Yet the way of Christ is not the way of a tyrant.²⁸⁴ Christ is Light who reveals the way to the Father. As does Christ, so should the vicar. And in regard to Christ and the Father, the Pope, as vicar, holds a share of the responsibility but not fullness of power (*pars sollicitudinis*).²⁸⁵ Supreme authority resides with GOD. The authority of the Pope springs from Christ not vice versa.²⁸⁶ We have but one Father, Who resides in Heaven, and one Teacher, who is the Christ.²⁸⁷ The decrees of Christ, the Gospel, form the foundation and framework of Christian life. Ecclesial decrees must rationally conform to the foundational spirit of those decrees.²⁸⁸ Humans make rational decisions based on understanding but human understanding is not complete. The Holy Spirit may provide infallible guidance.²⁸⁹ However, since humans are afforded volition, one may choose between ambition or submission to the Spirit. Even popes (and bishops) are not immune to worldly ambition, and the prerequisite for the effective collaboration with the Spirit is inner adherence to and observance of the Commandments (the principles of agape).²⁹⁰ If each of us must stand before the judgment seat of GOD,²⁹¹ then the exercise of volition must be a participation in divine power and the use of that power has consequences. Thus, every individual bears responsibility for their actions and has the right and duty to speak out against and refuse participation in perceived grave injustice. We must discern the tree by means of its fruit and be cautious even in regard to those holding high office or exalted reputation.²⁹² When a grave discrepancy arises between the dictates of humans and the word of GOD, "We must obey GOD rather than men."²⁹³ The authority of the Pope resides in service to Christ. And the way of Christ is agape. All are siblings under the Father,²⁹⁴ and there is an equality among those who respond to Christ's call - in that each becomes dedicated to Christ, each places their talents and abilities at the service of Christ. Yet, among them, those who are the most adept and those who give (of themselves) the most are

²⁸¹ *The Codex of Justinian*, 1.1.7.1-3; 1.1.8.7-11. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 3^d ed., s.vv. "PATRIA POTESTAS."

²⁸² Benson, "Plenitudo potestatis", pp 193-217; McCready, "Papal Plenitudo Potestatis", pp. 654-664.

²⁸³ Cf. Boniface VIII, "*Unam sanctam*." Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, libro 3, cap. 57.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:25-27; Matt 11:28-30; Phil 2:3-11.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Benson, "Plenitudo potestatis", pp 193-217.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Luke 6:40; John 13:15-17.

²⁸⁷ Matt 23:8-12.

²⁸⁸ Gratian, *Decretum*, D. 8 c. 4-9.

²⁸⁹ John 14:26, 16:13.

²⁹⁰ John 14:15-16, 23-24; 15:9-17. Matt 22:34-40. Luke 10:25-28. Wis 1:5 (Nova Vulgata). Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici*, annus 897, par. 1-4.

²⁹¹ Rom 14:10; Matt 25:31-46.

²⁹² Matt 10:16-20, 12:33-37. As the Holocaust so glaringly demonstrates.

²⁹³ Acts 4:19, 5:29. Cf. Matt 22:21; Rom 13:7. Under GOD, we owe public authority cooperation in developing, maintaining, and preserving the common good.

²⁹⁴ Matt 23:8-10.

the most esteemed.²⁹⁵ How shall we esteem the Pope? Is not honor due to a fellow human, to a servant of Christ, to a successor of the Chair of St. Peter, to a representative and conservator of Apostolic tradition, to the presider over the Roman Catholic and Uniate congregations? Yet, do not the leaders of a group share in the responsibility of the group's actions, past and present? Have not the Christian congregations, as outlined above, wreaked grave injury to their neighbors? How shall we resolve the dilemma? "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."²⁹⁶ Should not the all the baptized cooperate with the Pope insofar as he repents of traditions incongruous with agape and his instructions and injunctions accord with agape, reason, and prudence?

It has been declared:

"No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident."²⁹⁷

Yet, for how many thousands of years did humans regard it as manifestly evident the sun revolved around the earth? Was it not manifestly evident to the Romans lead (Pb) was an ideal material for the construction of water pipes?²⁹⁸ Was it not manifestly evident to the Fourth Lateran Council that heretics must be expelled from the lands?²⁹⁹ (This expulsion came to be interpreted as: put to death).³⁰⁰ Over 700 years later, it was manifestly evident to the Second Vatican Council that "the human person has a right to religious freedom."³⁰¹ Surely the Lateran IV bishops did not foresee the devastation intolerance would wreak upon Europe and the New World, the pretext it would afford unbridled self-interest, the communal enmity it would foster, and the disillusionment it would engender. Was not intolerance a root factor in the Crusades, the Inquisition, the militant subjugation and supplantation of foreign peoples, the Christian wars, and the Holocaust? Did not the Holocaust nakedly reveal the horrific results of its full effect? What is more tragic and heinous than the obedience and cooperation of the baptized to the Nazi terror? Is it not obvious that understanding, even among Magisterial ecclesiastics, can increase and change over time? Is it not time for Christians to recognize that error is a part of life, but not learning from avoidable disaster is sheer negligence and folly. Nevertheless, inerrant truth remains at hand, and that truth, according to Christ, is: humans were created to love one another. To not love is a regression to chaos. To follow Christ is to love as He loves, to extend that love to all – even those who know not love, that they may learn.

Conclusion

History and culture provide overwhelming evidence of generations of professed Christians behaving (especially toward outgroups) in ways contrary and incongruous to Christ's example

²⁹⁵ Matt 18:4-5, 20:25-28, 23:11-12; Mark 9:33-35.

²⁹⁶ Luke 17:3-4.

²⁹⁷ *Code of Canon Law*, 749.3.

²⁹⁸ Lead (Pb) is toxic to humans.

²⁹⁹ Fourth Lateran Council, Constitution/Canon 3, "On heretics".

³⁰⁰ Frederick II, *Liber Augustalis*, 1.1. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt.II-II, Q. 11, Art. 3-4.

³⁰¹ Vatican II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 2.

and fundamental teaching. These transgressions were not isolated incidents but general movements providing abundant evidence supporting those who view Christianity as ineffectual and even dangerous. Yet I call upon the reader to distinguish between those acts performed under a Christian banner, yet incompatible with the principles of agape, and those acts informed by agape – to not attribute to Christ those acts inconsistent with his teaching and example.³⁰² For upon closer inspection, we see the continued sway of pre-Christian traditions throughout the history of Greco-Roman Western culture even to the present. From the Apostolic Period to the Edict of Milan (313 CE), the society of the baptized supported and venerated those who preferred to face death rather than betray their fidelity to GOD.³⁰³ Yet did not the establishment of peace with Rome bring about, for the baptized, alteration in culture and practice? For “when in Rome, do as the Romans.”³⁰⁴ Did not the practice, inherited from Jewish tradition, of fidelity to the Covenant give way to obedience to *auctoritas*?³⁰⁵ And let’s not ignore the leveraging power of those holding coercive authority. Even the very Apostles abandoned, in fear, Christ upon his capture.³⁰⁶ Why does agape not reign supreme in human culture? Why was Christ rejected and crucified?³⁰⁷ It is said, “No one can be just who fears death or pain or exile or poverty”³⁰⁸ and all of these can be evoked against those who seek alteration in the established status quo.³⁰⁹ From before the time of Christ until now, the power of fear domineers humanity. And it will continue to do so unless and until each individual (or, at least, most) would rather face death than slay the innocent. Those controlled by fear are not free but under a tyrant. Christ frees us from tyranny that we may reside in agape.³¹⁰ To follow Christ is an act of free will: we must choose to do so. Though often shrouded, *Imperium* remains a prevalent tradition and force in western society and is concerned with perceived self-interest and not necessarily common good or justice. Thus, the way of Christ is also the way of the cross.³¹¹ And how many of the baptized are mature enough to fully embrace that cross?

Those who seek are able to find sufficient evidence to gain trust that Christ leads the way to the Father. However, is it not also evident that the “Sword of Eden” continues to guard the entrance to Heaven?³¹² Who has sufficient faithfulness, fortitude, and devotion to follow? It has been said, “Outside the Church there is no salvation.”³¹³ But is there salvation even inside the Church? What definition of Church and salvation provides cogency to the assertion? Let us reflect: As LORD and Sustainer of All, was not GOD necessarily present to creation and humanity even before the

³⁰² Cf. John 8:39.

³⁰³ Acts 5:29, 6:8-7:60, 12:2; “Letter of the Smyrnaeans”; “Martyrdom of Justin and Others”; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*; Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*.

³⁰⁴ Cf. Augustine, “To Januarius (Letter 54)”; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 185.

³⁰⁵ Cf. 1 Sam 8:6-8; Boniface VIII, “*Unam sanctam*”; Innocent IV, “*Ad extirpanda*”; Third Lateran Council, Canon 27.

³⁰⁶ Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50-52.

³⁰⁷ John 3:19; Matt 6:24.

³⁰⁸ Cicero, *De Officiis*, 2.11.38.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Matt 10:16-42, 24:9.

³¹⁰ Exod 6:6-8, 20:2-3; Luke 4:18-19; John 8:31-59.

³¹¹ Matt 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 14:27.

³¹² Gen 3:24.

³¹³ Boniface VIII, “*Unam sanctam*”; Fourth Lateran Council, Constitution/Canon 1, “On the catholic faith”; Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 14.

Incarnation?³¹⁴ Is it not held that GOD is Eternal and the same yesterday, today, and forever?³¹⁵ Before the Incarnation, did not Enoch, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Mary and others find favor and unite in communion with GOD?³¹⁶ Thus, it would seem the Incarnation (and the Sacraments) make(s) visible what has ever been true: GOD is united, at some level, to all humanity but, since each has been granted the power of volition, it is up to each individual person to seek friendship and unity with GOD: to unite in spirit with the Spirit of God, to unite in will with the Will of GOD.³¹⁷ We (humans) ever benefit from the Agape of GOD, but are we willing to become servants (vessels) of Agape: to unite in will and intention with the Father? We are told: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”³¹⁸ GOD is Agape.³¹⁹ Those who seek friendship with GOD, who seek to be pleasing to GOD, who seek His will and way ARE able to find Him and learn to harmonize in spirit with the Father by means of agape: such are the Church.³²⁰ The Word became flesh that the Way to the Father might be manifest to All.³²¹ How can we see GOD? By studying His word.³²² How can we know GOD? By following His word: practicing agape. What is salvation? Union in spirit with the Spirit of GOD. Who are the Church? Those who sincerely seek to conform their will to the Will of GOD.³²³ And what is GOD’s Will according to Christ? Agape. Agape is the Arc of Salvation. The physical reception of Baptism is not in itself enough, it requires the full spiritual assent and embrace of the recipient (metanoia) to be fruitful and enable the relinquishing of adherence to cultural traditions and social practices which conflict with the principles of agape.³²⁴ Consider: As the captain of a ship must continually adjust the thrust and rudder in accordance with existing conditions while pursuing his/her destination; must not the Christian remain ever faithful to the Covenant while continuously involved and immersed in daily activities? The primary goal of the captain is to reach the destination; of the faithful Christian, to persevere in maintaining communion with GOD and neighbor.³²⁵ Hence; the faithful, Christian captain strives to reach the destination **while** sustaining communion with GOD and neighbor. This illustrates the dimension Christ adds to the life of his adherents. The way of Christ is not malignant but salutary and healing. It enables unity and harmony with life, neighbor, and nature. Eudaimonia, joy, and peace are among its fruits. What Christ bids us is not complicated. Neither is it irrelevant that it should be dismissed nor detrimental that it deserve disparagement. In general, the burden of the cross is beneficial and not heavy;³²⁶ yet at some point our life will be required. Is life possible without

³¹⁴ Deut 32:39; Wis 6:7, 12:13; Isa 44:6; Matt 10:29-31; Luke 12:24.

³¹⁵ Ps 90:2, 102:26-27, 110:1-4; 1 Chr 16:34; Mal 3:6; John 1:1-5; Jas 1:17.

³¹⁶ Gen 5:24, 14:18; Ps 110:4; 2 Kgs 2:11-12; Matt 8:11, 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36, 13:28.

³¹⁷ Matt 6:10, 26:37; Luke 1:38, 22:42; John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38.

³¹⁸ Matt 7:7-8.

³¹⁹ 1 John 4:7-8.

³²⁰ Gen 15:6; Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23.

³²¹ John 1:1-4, 8:12, 10:9-10, 14:6.

³²² Cf. John 12:44-50, 14:6-11.

³²³ John 14:20-21, 23, 15:10-14, 17:16-24.

³²⁴ John 4:23-24; 2 Cor 6:1; Eph 4:22-24; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. III, Q. 69, Art. 9; Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11. “Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” (Exod 25:8 NJPS): We must surrender to GOD with all our heart before it is possible for GOD to reside in our heart.

³²⁵ Matt: 10:22, 24:13.

³²⁶ Matt 11:28-30 (*Interlinear Bible*).

sacrifice? Since life feeds upon life, how can we in justice not be willing to follow Christ in offering our life for the life of others? Shall we object when it becomes our turn to be the sacrificial lamb: to offer our very body and blood to others that they may have life, and to do so out of love for Christ and the Father?³²⁷ Shall we spend our life seeking to harmonize and unite in spirit with Life, Truth, and Love or mortally fighting to save and extend a temporal existence? Are not repentance and adherence to the practice of agape the Church's best defense (and offense) against the past atrocities of the baptized? Greed, deception, coercion are not the ways of Christ, nor, according to His light, the path to communion with the Eternal Father. Nonetheless, like a stream of pure water flowing in an open valley, countless are the acts of agape which occur without notice, yet whose testimony is human and communal life itself.

THEOS → Logos → kosmos

If GOD (THEOS) is the Source of all that is. And all that is is ordered according to the Divine Logos.³²⁸ Then attainment of kosmos (universal harmony, right relationship) requires adherence to Logos (Christ's teaching: agape).³²⁹

It is said: humans were made in the image of GOD and GOD is Love.³³⁰ Christ described the Eternal Being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is the work of human volition in reflecting this image?

From generation to generation, consecration to agape.

³²⁷ Cf. John 10:17-18.

³²⁸ When the Word became flesh (John 1:1-14), GOD humbled "himself" (Phil 2:6-8) in order to light the way to the Father. I did not use all caps for "Logos" in order to stress that GOD becomes small in order to communicate and instruct us in a manner we can fully understand. The Logos/Word bridges the gap between GOD and human. By harmonizing with the Logos, we harmonize with GOD and the natural order of Creation.

³²⁹ John 8:12, 51.

³³⁰ Gen 1:26-27; 1 John 4:7-8.

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