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## Christian Social Ethics in A Multicultural Society

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### Abstract

*Christian social ethics mean the unfolding of the basic Christian witness into the multiple dimensions of human existence. This paper proceeds in five steps. First it recalls the basic witness Christians are called to give: that God is with us, that we may trust God and that we give witness to God's love thru our love. Second, it is stressed that by love is not meant an emotion, but an attitude and action: respect for a person, including her rights, care and responsibility for her well being, refusal to give room to hatred, jealousy and arrogance. Third this Christian love has to be unfolded thru the whole expanse of human existence, the cultural, political, social and economic dimensions. Humankind faces five serious challenges. The fourth section asks what specific challenges Indonesia faces and what is demanded of us. The paper ends, fifth, by suggesting four concrete areas where every follower of Jesus could make her or his witness become real.*

**Keyword:** *Christian Ethics, Christian Values, Social Ethics*

### I. INTRODUCTION

30 years after the end of the cold war, we can even pinpoint this to February 24, 2022, the illusion of a growing global solidarity is over. For many of us, the fact that a big country, without being provoked, attacks another, non-threatening country was a serious shock. We might remember Francis Fukuyama's "*The End of History and the Last Man*" of 1991 where he argued that with the end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union mankind's ideological evolution had come to an end, with liberal democracy becoming the final form of human government. Fukuyama really looks ridiculous now.

But the *mene-tekel-fares* had been long on the wall: ongoing tensions in Eastern and Southern Europe, the total destabilization of the Middle East with dominant cooperation by the United States, the general political and economic mess in Africa, the only slowly growing awareness of a threatening climate crisis, also that somebody like Donald Trump could become president of the United States.

For us Christians, this global situation is a challenge. The challenge to reflect anew on what Christian social ethics may mean in this situation. What is demanded from us Christians in this multi-cultural, and multi-threatened, world. I shall proceed in

five steps. First I want to recall the basic witness we Christians are called to give: namely that God loves us and that we can trust Him. In a second step I stress that love is not an emotion, but an attitude and action. Thirdly I shall point out that this Christian love has to be unfolded thru the whole expanse of human existence, thru its cultural, political, social and economic dimensions. I name five serious challenges we face, and what it demands from us. In my fourth step *I ask what specific challenges we face in Indonesia*. I shall end, step five, by suggesting four concrete areas where every follower of Jesus could make her or his witness become real.

## II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### I. The Basic Christian Vocation

What is demanded of us, facing the challenges that threaten our future, is nothing else than doing what the risen Christ told his disciples: we are called to become His witnesses in the world. Witnesses to what Jesus told us and showed us: that we are not left alone in the world, that everyone of us is personally loved by God. And that we really may trust God's promise - in the face of all the terrible things surrounding us.

The center of our belief is the almost incredible fact that in Jesus God Himself joined us. That with Jesus we know: we are not alone, God is with us. There will be hatred and the cross, but belief in God and love will win, every tear will be washed from our face (Rev. 21: 4). We do not know how to end wars, feed all people and handle AI. But we are called to be witnesses to the fact, that God loves us and that we may trust him.

This means precisely the opposite of trying to impress the others by building impressive churches, putting huge statues into the landscape, organizing glamorous events. Our minority communities should never be felt as a threat or competition, but, in the opposite, fit into the existing cultural patterns of our social surroundings. We have to build up trusting communications. We should be perceived as being an integral part of the society. The existence of our Christian communities should be felt by our non-Christian sisters and brothers as support for everything they regard as good and positive. Thus we should be humble.

On the other hand, precisely because of our own limitations and weaknesses, we should allow ourselves to be enriched by every thing that is positive in our society. We are not only giving, we are also receiving. We should be learning and should, gratefully, allow ourselves to be supported by the goodness and positivity of our sisters and brothers.

### II. Love Is Not An Emotion, But An Attitude

Dear friends, we are called to give witness to God's love. There it is important to remember that love is at its essence not an emotion, but an attitude expressed in our actions. Of course, our attitudes should seep into our emotions. But if Christ demands that we love our enemies, he does not demand feelings of closeness, but that, in spite of them being our enemies, we wish them well. Or at least, that we give no room to hatred. This is not at all easy. But Jesus gave us His example on the cross - and Stephanus followed Jesus when he prayed for those who hated, slandered and killed him.

Love becomes real as a principled attitude of respect for every person, in always respecting her or his human rights. The Samaritan helping the man who was

robbed on the road to Jericho showed real love, in this context meaning taking responsibility for his well being. Love means helping neighbors who suffer or are in need. It means the refusal to give room to feelings of jealousy and arrogance. Our neighbor is every human that enters the room of our action, thus becomes our responsibility. To put it short: Christian love means that people, all people, can feel safe with us.

### III. What Christian Social Ethics Demands in Our Today's World

Dear friends, what do Christian Social Ethics mean in our today's world? Christian social ethics are probably the most important contribution of Christianity to defining of what kind of world we should, and would like to live in. Probably more influential than the whole of socialist, Marxist and Marxist/Leninist ideologies.

Allow me a note on the Catholic contribution: from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* which stressed the rights of industrial workers, thru the Second Vatican Council which finally opened the Catholic Church for the enlightenment values of freedom of religion, democracy, and human rights, by the slow, conflictual integration of Liberation Theology, up to *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti* by Pope Francis: these ethics are not just pious contemplations, they demand action, they have already inspired action, but still not yet sufficiently.

#### Five Extremely Serious Challenges

But I shall not further enter into Catholic teachings. Instead I want to point to five extremely serious challenges humanity faces today.

The first challenge is the growing global crisis of democracy. Democracy is certainly a human success story. It makes living together in dignity, freedom and solidarity possible. But democracy is now under extreme stress. In India the big Muslim and the smaller Christian minorities are under growing persecution. In the Middle East democracy never took hold. Africa is a corrupt and bloody mess. Democracies in Latin America are breaking down. Most worrying, because not really expected, is the growth of populist movements in established Western democracies. When one third of US citizens believe that their last election was stolen, then the basis of democratic tolerance is crumbling. In Germany and other places conspiracy theories growingly emaciate democratic openness by Covid-conspiracy anxieties, unreasonable Islamophobia and hatred towards migrants.

The second challenge, felt not only in Indonesia, being behind the violence in the Middle East and being felt everywhere is the spread of religiously or ideologically motivated extremism. Thus of, mostly religiously motivated, exclusive ideologies, not afraid of using violence and terror.

The third challenge is simply the inability of humankind to abolish hunger and to guarantee every human being on earth a life where her or his human dignity feels respected. How could Karl Marx have been so totally wrong! Marx thought that capitalism would collapse because of its own internal contradictions. But capitalism never looked like collapsing. Capitalism essentially produces winners and losers and does nothing for the loser. Even in advanced industrial nations the lower income middle class is slowly sliding into poverty. Global capitalism is splitting the world into succeeding and failed nations. And since attention to the natural environment is expensive, capitalism intrinsically works against necessary action to save the planet. Quite terrible.

The fourth challenge are the catastrophic consequences of climate change and the breakdown of our natural environment. I believe that humankind will definitely not take the harsh measures demanded to avoid such a catastrophe. It might beginning to be felt within 20 years.

The fifth challenge is the development of artificial intelligence (AI) which I do not want to enter here. I only remind you of Yuval Noah Harari's prediction in his "21 lessons for the 21st century" that in 2050 50 percent of the human population will be "irrelevant". Adhuh!

#### How To Face The Challenges?

Dear friends, you certainly do not expect me to make any suggestions on how we can handle these five challenges. I shall do something else. I want to point to three ethical convictions and three fundamental tasks we, humankind, should focus on. Three ethical convictions meaning: What ever policies we take, what ever problems we face, we should never compromise these three ethical convictions. Three fundamental tasks humankind should never lose sight of, meaning: What ever we do in the fields of political, economic and other social activity: These three tasks should be given priority, absolute priority.

The three ethic convictions that have to become a consensus of whole humanity - where every violation should be condemned - are, first, that in all situations, facing all kinds of challenges, the fundamental human rights of every human person have to be respected. Secondly, that political power needs democratic legitimation. Thirdly, that differences and conflict are not allowed to be solved by violence and war.

These three ethical convictions have to be absolutely upheld against any utilitarian considerations, they have to be planted into the algorithms of AI. They also have to be spread and disseminated so that they really become the conviction of global humanity.

And there are three fundamental task that humankind should give itself, to make them real under any circumstances. The first: States, international political bodies, society should take all possible actions to make sure that, in the shortest of time, there are no more people having to go hungry. Humanity has the means to make sure that there is enough food for every person on earth, therefore we are under heavy obligation not to allow people still going hungry.

The second task is to build real solidarity across economic, religious, racial, sexual and other differences. Thus an effort to fight discriminations. Humanity and peace are under threat by growing exclusiveness' and discrimination, often taking the populist perspective of "we" against "them". What is demanded of us is responsibility: Among "us" nobody must be left behind, or being sidelined because his or her national, racial, religious, social or sexual identity.

The third task really does not need an explanation. Time is running out on saving earth for humans. Therefore we have to agree to take all actions and policies, including that demand deep changes in our life styles, in order to avoid a catastrophic breakdown of our natural environment.

#### IV. The Challenges We Face in Indonesia

Let us now ask: What are the specific challenges we have to face in Indonesia? First it has of course to be said that the five challenges facing humankind, which we

just talked about, fully challenges us in Indonesia too. But now I want to ask: what are the particular challenges we face?

First we may note, gratefully, that, in comparison with many other countries Indonesia is not doing too badly. But there is no reason for complacency. We are a working democracy, but our democratic substance is shrinking. The growing limitation of freedom of opinion, the weakening of our Anti Corruption Commission, the low quality of our political parties are worrying. While relations between the religions are generally good, intolerance is still a fact in Indonesia, and mainstream religious communities feel threatened by religious radicalism.

In the meantime, while our rich upper classes get richer and richer, more than 30 million Indonesians are still stuck in extreme poverty and at least 50 percent of the population, about 140 million of our sisters and brothers, still live precariously. At the same time our rivers and seashores are clogged by plastic and other waste. Our sources of water are threatened, our forests are being cut down at a worrying speed. And I do not want to speak about how shamefully Indonesia treats our sisters and brothers in Papua.

Actually the five principles of our Pancasila state philosophy provide an excellent framework to solve our problems and to steer the nation into the future. But our Pancasila nation will only survive, and religious extremism will only be rejected, if Indonesia is not split vertically: 50 percent getting richer and richer, and 50 percent feel forgotten. Only if the 50 percent of Indonesians still living precariously, will feel that their children can hope for a better future in our Pancasila Indonesia, religious populism - which uses the model: "we the majority are left in poverty while they, the minority, get richer and richer, on our backs" - will not get broad support.

Thus our first priority, under all scenarios, must be the elimination of poverty and the establishing of social justice. For all Indonesians.

The second priority for Indonesia is based on the insight that Indonesia can only survive, if we accept each other in our differences. There must be zero tolerance to intolerance. We must on principle accept that we, Indonesians, as Indonesians, have different ethnic, cultural and religious identities. We need a new social contract based on principled respect of human rights, rejection of discrimination, social justice, respect for the human dignity of every person, respect for our cultural plurality.

The third priority is already clear: We have to save our natural environment. We have to take the necessary actions, now! We have to end the cheap lip service both our political establishment from the president down to local leaders, and of us, the people, give to the safeguarding of our planet. It doesn't look promising.

## **V. Make Our Christian Witness Become Real**

Dear friends, giving witness in such a situation means: we Christians have to be fully involved with our other Indonesian sisters and brothers, and with all humankind, in facing these challenges. But allow me to offer four suggestions on how we can, and in fact should, make our commitment to giving witness to the redeeming power of Christ become real.

First, we should never give room to feelings of resentment, hatred or revenge. Even if we experience injustice and intolerance. We should look at Jesus. We wish every body well. This is a sign that God is with us.

Secondly, on all levels: in our private lives, in our parishes, at our working places, in politics if we get the chance, we have to translate into reality our option for

the poor. We must be together with the poor, the poor must feel safe with us. We should never forget. If we look for Jesus, we will find Him among the poor. Let not our communities become a meeting place for upper middle classes only.

Thirdly, we have to build trusting relationships with our sisters and brothers from other religions and beliefs. They, too have things "true and holy" (Nostra Aetate, 2). We should, on all levels, build communication. They should feel that we are their friends, friends in the Lord.

Fourthly: Facing the growing threat of a catastrophic breakdown of our natural environment, we Christians should adopt a personal style of life that is fully in compliance with what is demanded from us all. For instance by not using plastics, by scaling down our consumption of meat, by managing our waste in a most up-to-date way, by avoiding unnecessary travel.

### III. CONCLUSION

Dear friends, we are facing huge challenges. We do not know how things will develop. We have to have an open mind. But our faith says, we will not be left alone. To this we are called to be witnesses. With Jesus, God is with us, His Spirit is with us. Thank you.

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