AN AFTERTHOUGHT

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To sing of the Lord's goodness is to bring Good News.

To proclaim the risen Christ will fill the world with hope.

But that message always needs to be explained

in words that sway the doubting mind

and in actions that prove what words never could.

But in many cultures Christ's name has not been spoken.

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

The Lord is never a foreigner in any land, in any culture,

but in each generation his name must be spoken anew,

even in traditionally Christian lands.

Where would Europe be without the culture that grew around faith in Jesus Christ and his power to transform the vision of life?

Christians should always have their answer ready when people ask them for the reasons for the hope they have.

Being courteous and respectful does not mean they have to apologise for what they are and what they believe.

And there can be no evangelisation unless Christ's name is heard.

Christians have so much to offer this world

when many find it so easy to disparage life in its weakest forms

and seek to blot out the value of love at its purest and most creative.

Christians must listen well to hear men and women's deepest needs.

They need to be wise and prudent in discerning their responses

to the issues of today.

They need to learn how to harvest the wonders of technology without being overcome with awe and blind to its limits.

They need, above all, to surrender to the Lord and trust Him.

The new Millennium is the time for a fresh start.

This is the time to understand time:

to learn to know and love our Christian heritage,

to see the present moment in the guiding light of God's Word,

to build a future where people will recognise the Kingdom.

The key is to meet the needs of people's hearts,

not what they are taught to want but what they really need,

to learn their language and speak in words they understand,

to learn their customs and act in ways they will respect,

to listen quietly and respectfully to stories of their fragility,

to walk with them to meet the risen Lord

who will fill them with joy and hope and love.

The Church must always be a loving Mother and a humble Teacher.

As Mother, she must have faith in all her children

so that they can have faith in her and know they are loved by God.

As Teacher, she must fill them with confidence

and make them bold enough to speak the truth whatever that costs.

For the peoples of the world deserve more than lies and half-truths,

and beautiful words that die once spoken,

for they are made to be with the Lord,

and their hearts are restless till they rest in Him.

This has to be a humble confidence

that does not force its way into positions of influence

but helps the little flock to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

The salt is the flavour of wholesome fare,

not crass immorality, exploitation or mindless amusement.

The light shows how much space there is in the universe

for God to enrich humanity and never be a threat at all.

But there are obstacles and challenges to God's Good News.

Many have simply never heard of Christ,

others fear the strength of the faith of believers,

still others feel threatened by what they think his Church is.

There are some whose bitter hurt makes revenge their goal;

to wound the Body of Christ is their programme.

Good men and women live in such dire circumstances

that they have little time to think of God.

We must not be content with talking to our fellow-believers

in safe words we all understand.

When heart talks to heart and faith really talks to culture

God will show us ways, new and old, to help men and women

transform their families, their schools and universities,

the places where they work and spend their leisure time,

their societies, their cultures.

Patient and wise learning and teaching will bring us all

along the way to Christ, who is our Joy.