

The Church: A 'Social icon' of the Gospel

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In a 1991 writing, renowned theologian and bishop of Aachen, Klaus Hemmerle (1929-1994), reflected on the presuppositions for a renewed encounter between the Gospel and today's world. Excerpts of the article are published below. The original Italian text is accessible at: <http://www.indaco-torino.net/gens/>

The gap between Word and life, between Word and the envisioned world of our lives, calls for a new "Bible of the poor". Images are insufficient. It must instead be through life; through our own individual lives but also communally. [...]

Like small children, we need to relearn the ABCs of the Gospel. But the key to understanding is neither mere speculation or reflection alone. Rather it is in our personal lives, including our relationships with one another. There is a need to first discover and experience, step by step, the Gospel in our own lives. Only then will it shed light on others and challenge them as well.[...]

The Gospel becomes resoundingly understandable only when it has imbued the life of Christians and thus becomes the concrete response to the burning questions of our times. Persons today can find an answer in an image before them, in the image of a transformed and renewed *life*, in a transformed and renewed *society*. [...]

It is a matter of becoming aware that the Church is called to be the "societal icon" of the Gospel. In fact, the word *icon* means image, something that renders a reality palpably present and visible for us. [...]

[T]he modern-day search for a united world risks ignoring the unifying power of the person of Jesus. But wherever the Church is a living witness to that which she proclaims - a *societal icon* of the Gospel - it is clear then that only the Risen Lord can achieve this desired unity both in the lives of individuals and in our human coexistence. [...]

We are certainly not the ones who can bring about this attractive ideal. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes of us this living icon, expressing itself in ever new images and words in order to communicate the Gospel to the men and women of today.