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*This is an excerpt from my latest manuscript[[1]](#footnote-1), which is an invitation to become more religiously tolerant.*

Introduction

*Christ: A New Perspective* is an invitation to change. It is a work of theological reflection for our times, intended to strengthen the heart and will of anyone who wishes to creatively engage the world in which we find ourselves. What are “our times?” We are born into a time in history.[[2]](#footnote-2) The world at large, the cultures and politics of each region, the weather, advances in medical science, the means of communication and travel, these and many other factors set the stage for what life will be like for any person born in that era. Along with the unique individuality of each human person comes a world defined and already in process. Every person must live out their dreams and ambitions, making plans, working constantly within the web of relationships, environmental factors, and social laws, in peacetime or in war, in droughts or tsunamis, in good health or in sickness, in freedom or in oppression. Louis Janssens, a 20th Century Catholic moral theologian and Jesuit priest, noted as well, looking back at the work of the Second Vatican Council, that “in every group or nation, there is an ever-increasing number of men and women who are conscious of themselves as the artisans and authors of the culture of their community.”[[3]](#footnote-3) This book is written for the artisans and authors who see themselves confronting the problems of the 21st Century.

What do we see around us? We have great technological advances, internet, computers, air travel, medical treatments for cancer and heart attacks, democratic systems of government around the world, a United Nations, Emergency Response Teams for every kind of natural and manmade disaster. We have an amazing array of cultural expressions, film, music, painting, sculpture, literature and theatre, and architectural wonders. The natural world astounds us with its beauty. We have the Olympics, the Superbowl, neighborhood baseball teams and bowling alleys. Many people wake up every morning and count their blessings, grateful to have been born into such an advanced culture with such richness and pleasures.

But we live in a world at war. From the perspective of life in American society, we are waging a war against terrorism on many levels, mentally and militarily. The global community is weighed down by religious hatred and misunderstanding, intolerance, racism and ethnocentricity. The poverty of large populations of people around the world is heart wrenching. The wheels of capitalism and productivity have been squeaking, if not screeching to a halt lately, and many more people struggle to get the basic necessities of life. And as scientists try to communicate with people about threats to the environment, from over-fishing the seas, to pollution and global warming, our natural world seems more threatening, as storms of rain, hail and snow bring ordinary life to a standstill and droughts push peoples from their homes and lands. It is a world in need of artisans and authors, research scientists, diplomats and doctors. It is a world in need of prayer. This text is a call to prayer, for all people who see the deep spiritual meanings in life, people who practice their faith with attention and devotion. It is a call to prayer for individuals who have lost their faith, their sense of direction and purpose, for people who are afraid.

I’ve been in and out of college classrooms for the past twenty years, teaching theology classes to young people. And it was not so long ago I was standing in front of a group of students and a tremendous feeling of sadness overwhelmed me. I could recall happier, easier times, when college students were worrying about their upcoming final exam, or whether they had a date Friday night. And as I stood in that classroom, I thought “we are robbing these young people of their innocence, their hopes and dreams.” Now they worry about their friends who are soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, their student loans and whether they will have a job when they graduate. And as naïve as it sounds, I thought to myself, why is the world in worse shape now than it was when I was growing up? And since I see myself in that group of people who are artisans and authors, I wondered what I should do. And it came to me, become a peacemaker.

Every person has a place in this world, a role to play in the great movement of human society. My single voice, my simple actions are what is asked of me. How to become a peacemaker in this world? The answer seemed clear to me: become a voice, an instrument, of religious tolerance. As a theologian and believer that is what is being asked of me. The response to religious hatred and misunderstanding and intolerance, is to peacefully, intentionally, openly act with religious tolerance. What of other people of faith, who want to make the world a better place? A change of heart and mind is needed in this complex world of religious diversity, to form new bonds of human friendship and solidarity. We need to build skills in religious tolerance. But how, if this is unfamiliar ground? This text is an effort for just such a person, with an instinct to be a part of making the world a better place, but who finds themselves on unfamiliar ground when it comes to religious tolerance. How do you move yourself to a different place intellectually, personally, spiritually, to reach across barriers that are destroying our world?

What I am proposing is a journey towards tolerance. It is not without its dangers. It requires courage and humility, a listening heart and a desire to accept others. What if you want to embrace religious pluralism as the spiritual way of the 21st Century, where religions of great difference find common ground? Fears abound. Fears that you would betray your own religious tradition. Fears that your willingness to be more open-minded will be met with harsh judgment and condemnation, in this world and the next. And so this needs to be a journey, a spiritual movement allowing for safe passage, allowing for change to unfold in a way that keeps one’s heart at peace. Why work so hard, take such risks? For reasons that somehow have never changed, to build a better world for the children, yours and mine, and the ones yet to be born. For me, it is on behalf of my own children and with the hope that one day, another professor in another classroom, will look out at her students and wonder whether they are paying attention to her on a Friday afternoon or whether they are too caught up in their weekend plans.

1. *Christ: A New Perspective, the life of faith in a diverse world.* ***All Rights Reserved.*** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One of the “eight characteristics of the human person adequately considered,” articulated by Louis Janssens, SJ, that served to define the define the human person, which he considered necessary as the first step in developing his theory of moral decision-making. See Janssens, “Artificial Insemination: Ethical Considerations,” *Louvain Studies*, 8 (1980), pp. 3-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Janssens, quoting *The Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World,* paragraph 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)