



## PRIESTHOOD

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The Sedos Staff wishes all our Readers a peaceful end to this year and thanks you very much for your cooperation and interest during the year. We should like to remind Members that they have a right to three free copies of the bulletin, instead those who are not members are invited to renew their subscription for 2017.

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The Sedos Staff.

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## Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are coming to the end of the year 2016. For the SEDOS team it was the first time to serve its members with some new documentation and study on Global Mission through the SEDOS Bulletin. We made some fundamental changes to the Bulletin so that its readers may enjoy more its outlook, and can learn more from its content. We will do our utmost to continue in this line next year with our new President of SEDOS, Sr. Veronica Openibo, Superior General of the Society of the Holy Child, SHCJ. She has already served three years as Vice-President. The new Vice-President will be Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, MCCJ. We welcome them both from our heart!

Brother Emili Turù, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, FMS, has come to the end of his term as President of SEDOS. It was a pleasure working with him. Thanks to his readiness to help us in the running of the SEDOS office we were able to move on with some needed reorganization quickly. At the Annual General Assembly of 1 December, 2016, the members were informed about this, and were shown the first results. The participants gave us some interesting points to focus on next year, among others the topic of interculturality and the celebration of the Fifth Centenary of the Reformation.

We wish to close this year with the bulletin on the topic of "Priesthood". With Christmas we celebrate the coming of the High Priest Jesus Christ. Jesus had a threefold mission as Prophet, Priest, and King. And so do we! We share in his priesthood as Christians, and especially as ordained priests. James Kroeger, MM, points out the ten fundamental themes in Pope Francis' dynamic vision of priesthood.

The first of these is just this fundamental relationship with Christ. In the next article, Jesus Moreno Led deepens these three basic branches of pastoral work, being priest, prophet and king. Our pastoral and missionary work comes forth and is based on these three. He shares with us the idea that "life and mission of the Church is not possible without the positive openness to the world". The last article we have chosen gives a concrete example of the struggle of foreign priests, missionary priests, in The Netherlands. The priest there is torn between two loves: presence versus projects, parish work versus missionary work, priority to clergy or laity in the parish, and so on. The struggle as a foreign priest to be accepted by the local clergy and laity is not an easy task. A good preparation on the side of the foreign priest, and awareness building on the side of the Dutch Catholics is necessary.

The Document we have selected is a study done by Daryll Gordon Stanton on some bad habits of African Church leaders, and how they can be avoided. These *ten bad habits* are not limited to the African Church only. One can find them back in all parts of the world, and priests as well as lay-people will have to make an effort to go against them. The first article in this SEDOS Bulletin, the ten invitations of Pope Francis to live our priesthood to the full, can be seen as a perfect answer to these ten bad habits.

We are not perfect as human beings, and thus also as priest or/and missionary. It was for this reason that SEDOS organized an *Interreligious Pilgrimage to the Holy Door*, just a few days before the closure of the Holy Year, this year. Many of us came there together to pray and to ask for forgiveness for our wrongdoings towards other religions, and to forgive the wrongdoing of our religious

neighbours to us. You can read more about it in the article by Raffaele Luise, a journalist who is member of the Religions for Peace Italy. A short video of the event was made by a friend, Eugene Hertoghe:

<https://vimeo.com/193203862>

*SEDOS wishes you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, 2017!*



James H. Kroeger, MM

## **Pope Francis' dynamic vision of priesthood**

### Ten Foundational Themes

Pope Francis, truly a “people’s pope,” connects and interacts well with people across a wide spectrum of ages, backgrounds, social strata and walks of life. He is noted for a large number of “firsts”: first Jesuit pope; first to take the name Francis; first non-European pope in more than 1,000 years; the first pope to be honored in 2013 by Time as “Person of the Year,” the prestigious title given to the one who “has done the most to influence the events of the year.”

Pope Francis, who has over ten million followers on Twitter, is often remembered for his sense of humor and memorable quotes. When he was elected pope in 2013, he told the other cardinals: “May God forgive you for what you have done.” A child once asked him if he wanted to be pope and this was his response: “You have to be totally crazy to want to be pope.” His quotes contain much profound wisdom, expressed succinctly and in a memorable manner. “A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just.” “To be wise, use three languages: think well, feel well, and do well. And to be wise, allow yourselves to be surprised by the love of God!”

In addition to insights on a broad range of current topics, Pope Francis has spoken profoundly and insightfully on priests and the priesthood on a variety of occasions (e.g. Chrism Masses, Ordination Masses, Jubilee for Priests, etc.). This modest presentation attempts to mine the rich treasures of Francis’ insights on priesthood, quoting extensively the very words spoken by the pope; it revolves around ten pivotal themes. Admittedly, this is only one author’s attempt to “thematize” the thought of Pope Franciscus on the priesthood. Twenty-four of the most relevant documents that contain “priesthood material” are cited (see final page for bibliographic sources and

the method of citation). One now turns directly to elucidating the “priestly thought” of Pope Francis.

#### **I. Anchor Your Priesthood in Your Relationship with Christ.**

In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (3), Francis directly invited everyone (priests in particular) to daily engagement with Jesus. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her.... The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms” (CC). “Each of us is very dear to God, who loves us, chooses us and calls us to serve.... We would do well each day to pray trustingly for this, asking to be healed by Jesus, to grow more like him who “no longer calls us servants but friends” (Jn 15:15)” (SS). This is a clear challenge for priests: to live in conformity to Christ in the midst of the world of today. Expressed simply, all is anchored in one’s friendship with Jesus.

Pope Francis spoke about the priest’s “tiredness” in his 2015 Chrism Mass homily, noting how it can bring us closer to Christ. “The tiredness of priests! Do you know how often I think about this weariness which all of you experience? I think about it and I pray about it, often, especially when I am tired myself.... Whenever we feel weighed down by pastoral work, we can be tempted to rest however we please, as if rest were not itself a gift of God.... Our weariness is precious in the eyes of Jesus who embraces us and lifts us up....

Let us never forget that a key to fruitful priestly ministry lies in how we rest and in how we look at the way the Lord deals with our weariness. How difficult it is to learn how to rest! This says much about our trust and our ability to realize that we too are sheep; we need the help of the Shepherd” (KK). We need to learn to rest in the arms of the Good Shepherd.

During the 2016 Jubilee for Priests, Pope Francis, celebrating the Eucharist on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, noted that we must always “contemplate two hearts: the Heart of the Good Shepherd and our own heart as priests. The Heart of the Good Shepherd is not only the Heart that shows us mercy, but is itself mercy.... There I know I am welcomed and understood as I am; there, with all my sins and limitations, I know the certainty that I am chosen and loved. Contemplating that heart, I renew my first love; the memory of that time when the Lord touched my soul and called me to follow him, the memory of the joy of having cast the nets of our life upon the sea of his Word” (WW). “Never forget your first love. Never!” (GG)

Certainly, for priests, our relationship with Christ is intimately linked into the Eucharist. “Through your ministry, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect for it is united to the sacrifice of Christ, which through your hands in the name of the whole of the Church is offered up in a bloodless way on the altar in the celebration of the holy mysteries. When you celebrate the Mass, understand, therefore, what you do. Do not do it in haste! Imitate what you celebrate—it is not an artificial rite, an artificial ritual—so that participating in the mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection you may bear the death of Christ in your members and walk with him in the newness of life” (LL).

As priests, we “cannot live without a vital, personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ.... [One] who is not daily nourished by the Food will become a bureaucrat.... Daily prayer, assiduous reception of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation, daily contact with the Word of God and a spirituality which translates into lived charity—these are vital nourishment for each of us. Let

it be clear to all of us that apart from Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:8)” (HH).

## **II. As a Merciful Shepherd, Be Close to Your People.**

Pope Francis boldly stated: “People love their priests; they want and need their shepherds! The faithful never leave us without something to do, unless we hide in our offices or go out in our cars wearing sun glasses. There is a good and healthy tiredness. It is the exhaustion of the priest who wears the smell of the sheep, but also smiles the smile of a father rejoicing in his children or grandchildren.... If Jesus is shepherding the flock in our midst, we cannot be shepherds who are glum, plaintive or, even worse, bored. The smell of the sheep and the smile of a father” (KK).

“The joy of Jesus the Good Shepherd is not a joy for himself alone, but a joy for others and with others, the true joy of love. This is also the joy of the priest. He is changed by the mercy that he freely gives.... Dear priests, in the Eucharistic celebration we rediscover each day our identity as shepherds. In every Mass, may we truly make our own the words of Christ: “This is my body, which is given up for you.” This is the meaning of our life; with these words, in a real way we can daily renew the promises we made at our priestly ordination. I thank all of you for saying ‘yes!’” (WW).

Speaking of the “priest-shepherd in his parish or in the mission entrusted to him,” Francis noted that this mission “brings him joy whenever he is faithful to it, whenever he does all that he has to do and lets go of everything that he has to let go of, as long as he stands firm amid the flock which the Lord has entrusted to him: Feed my sheep (cf. Jn 21:16-17).... All who are called should know that genuine and complete joy does exist in this world: it is the joy of being taken from the people we love and then being sent back to them as dispensers of the gifts and counsels of Jesus, the one Good Shepherd who, with deep compassion for all the little ones and the outcasts of this earth, wearied and oppressed like sheep without a shepherd, wants to associate many others

to his ministry, so as Himself to remain with us and to work, in the person of his priests, for the good of his people” (EE). “Have always in mind the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve; to seek and save that which was lost” (RR).

Priests will share in the sufferings of their people. “In our prayer we ask for the grace to “feel and savor” the Gospel that it can make us more “sensitive” in our lives.... We can ask for the grace to taste with the crucified Jesus the bitter gall of all those who share in his cross, and smell the stench of misery—in field hospitals [a favorite expression of Pope Francis], in trains and in boats crammed with people. The balm of mercy does not disguise this stench. Rather, by anointing it, it awakens new hope” (VV).

For Pope Francis, the work of priests does not consist of “purely mechanical jobs, like running an office, building a parish hall, or laying out a soccer field for the young of the parish.... The tasks of which Jesus speaks call for the ability to show compassion; our hearts are to be “moved” and fully engaged in carrying them out. We are to rejoice with couples who marry; we are to laugh with the children brought to the baptismal fount; we are to accompany young fiancés and families; we are to suffer with those who receive the anointing of the sick in their hospital beds; we are to mourn with those burying a loved one.... For us priests, what happens in the lives of our people is not like a news bulletin: we know our people, we sense what is going on in their hearts. Our own heart, sharing in their suffering, feels “compassion,” is exhausted, broken into a thousand pieces, moved and even “consumed” by the people” (KK).

The message for priests that Pope Francis frequently reiterates is expressed in his words spoken at the ordination of ten priests on Good Shepherd Sunday in 2013: “Today I ask you in the name of Christ and the Church: never tire of being merciful” (BB). When he ordained thirteen priests on May 11, 2014, Francis said: “And here I want to pause to ask you: for the love of Jesus Christ, never tire of being merciful! Please!” (FF). At the 2016 Chrism Mass, Francis noted: “As priests, we are witnesses to and ministers of the ever-increasing abun-

dance of the Father’s mercy; we have the rewarding and consoling task of incarnating mercy, as Jesus did” (QQ). *Misericordiae Vultus*, Francis’ 2015 Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, overflows with copious insights on the mercy of God. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis quotes Thomas Aquinas, asserting that “mercy is the greatest of all virtues” and “it is proper to God to have mercy” (EG 37).

### **III. Seek to Live a Modest Life-style; Be Available.**

Although diocesan priests do not take the vow of poverty like religious priests, all priests commit themselves to living and practicing a simple style of life. It is well known that during his years in Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio lived in a small apartment rather than in an episcopal residence; he used public transportation rather than have a car with a driver; he cooked for himself. As newly elected pope he rode with the other cardinals on the bus, paid his own hotel bill, and now he maintains a very modest car and lives in the Casa Santa Marta. Pope Francis knows the material needs necessary for the apostolate; however, he also challenges his fellow priests to examine their sincerity and authenticity in living their own spiritual poverty.

Francis admits: “In the Church we have, and have always had, our sins and failings.... Our people forgive us priests many failings, except for that of attachment to money. This does not have so much to do with money itself, but the fact that money makes us lose the treasure of mercy. Our people can sniff out which sins are truly grave for the priest, the sins that kill his ministry.... Being merciful is not only “a way of life,” but “the way of life.” There is no other way of being a priest” (VV).

How do priests become “good and faithful servants” (cf. Mt 25:21)? For Francis, “we are asked to be available.... Each morning he trains himself to be generous with his life and to realize that the rest of the day will not be his own, but given over to others.... One who serves is open to surprises, to God’s constant surprises.... One who serves is not worried about the timetable. It deeply troubles me

when I see a timetable in a parish: “From such a time to such a time.” And then? There is no open door, no priest, no deacon, no layperson to receive people. This is not good.... If you show that you are available to others, your ministry will not be self-serving, but evangelically fruitful” (SS).

Francis has spoken frequently on the virtue of availability in priests. In his 2014 Chrism Mass, he noted: “The availability of her priests makes the Church a house with open doors, a refuge for sinners, a home for people living on the streets, a place of loving care for the sick, a camp for the young, a classroom for catechizing children about to make their First Communion.... Wherever God’s people have desires or needs, there is the priest, who knows how to listen (ob-audire) and feels a loving mandate from Christ who sends him to relieve that need with mercy or to encourage those good desires with resourceful charity” (EE).

Pope Francis’ commitment to simple living is concretely reflected in his choice of name: Francis. Many of the details of his “name-choice” are commonly known, since Francis himself narrated them. When it became clear that he was chosen, his friend, Cardinal Claudio Hummes who was seated next to him, hugged him, gave him a kiss, and said: “Don’t forget the poor!” Francis said: “Those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty.” Francis added: “How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor.” In his *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis has a major section on the inclusion of the poor in the Church and society (EG 186-216); he strongly reiterates his desire: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” (EG 198).



#### IV. Admit One’s Limitations; Become a Model of Integrity.

The Letter to the Hebrews (5:1) states that “every high priest has been taken from among men and made their representative before God.” *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the Vatican II document on the Ministry and Life of Priests, asserts: “Priests, who are taken from among men and ordained for men in the things that belong to God in order to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, nevertheless live on earth with other men as brothers” (PO 3). Priests are truly to be “in this world, but not of this world”; they need to be deeply aware of both their “nothingness”/“humanness” as well as their “greatness”/“dignity.” Even in their weaknesses they are to manifest the overwhelming power and presence of the divine. The manifold workings of God’s grace within our human limitations is indeed a profound mystery; we priests should allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by God’s loving mercy—and shed tears of joyful gratitude!

Francis says: “That is how we [priests] have to see ourselves: poised between our utter shame and our sublime dignity. Dirty, impure, mean and selfish, yet at the same time, with feet washed, called and chosen to distribute the Lord’s multiplied loaves, blessed by our people, loved and cared for. Only mercy makes this situation bearable. Without it, either we believe in our own righteousness like the Pharisees, or we shrink back like those who feel unworthy.... The important thing is that each of us feel that fruitful tension born of the Lord’s mercy: we are at one and the same time sinners pardoned and sinners restored to dignity” (TT). “The mercy of God ... is always “greater” than our consciousness of our sinfulness” (UU).

Pope Francis asserts that “A good priest, therefore, is first of all a man with his own humanity, who knows his own history, with its riches and its wounds, who has learned to make peace with this, achieving the funda-

mental serenity proper to one of the Lord's disciples.... Our humanity is the "earthen vessel" in which we conserve God's treasure, a vessel we must take care of, so as to transmit well its precious contents.... He is the "high priest," at the same time close to God and close to man; he is the "servant," who washes the feet and makes himself close to the weakest; he is the "good shepherd," who always cares for his flock" (OO).

One can identify various faults and failures in priests which receive harsh words from Pope Francis: the sin of careerism / authoritarianism / [and] "clericalism which is a distortion of religion" (DD). There is the sin of "existential schizophrenia ... the disease of those who live a double life, the fruit of that hypocrisy typical of the mediocre" (HH). On several occasions Pope Francis told priests to be much more merciful to divorced Catholics and to welcome remarried couples and their children to the Church (NN). "The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open.... Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community; nor should the doors of the sacraments [e.g. Baptism, Eucharist] be closed for simply any reason" (EG 47).

Therefore, priests need to constantly examine their conscience and style of life. Pope Francis offers a very brief examination of conscience for priests: "Where is my heart? Among the people, praying with and for the people, involved in their joys and sufferings, or rather among the things of the world, worldly affairs, my private space?" (OO). For another approach, Francis suggests the "hymn to charity" in Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as a guide for an examination of conscience (JJ). In addition, do we priests realize that we are "useless servants" (Lk 17:10), "whom the Lord blesses with the fruitfulness of his grace, seats at his table, and serves us the Eucharist"? (VV). Priests—the entire Church—must never become "self-referential!" (VV)

## **V. Exude Joy in Ministry; Receive and Give Affection.**

The dominant theme for Pope Francis' second Chrism Mass reflection (2014) was "priestly joy." "We recall the happy day of the institution of the priesthood, as well as the day of our own priestly ordination. The Lord anointed us in Christ with the oil of gladness, and this anointing invites us to accept and appreciate this great gift: the gladness, the joy of being a priest. Priestly joy is a priceless treasure, not only for the priest himself, but for the entire faithful people of God: that faithful people from which he is called to be anointed and which he, in turn, is sent to anoint" (EE).

"Priestly joy has its source in the Father's love, and the Lord wishes the joy of this love to be "ours" and to be "complete" (Jn 15:11).... There are three significant features of our priestly joy. It is a joy which anoints us..., it is a joy which is imperishable, and it is a missionary joy which spreads and attracts.... A joy which anoints us. In a word, it has penetrated deep within our hearts; it has shaped them and strengthened them sacramentally.... We are anointed down to our very bones, and our joy, which wells up from deep within, is the echo of this anointing. An imperishable joy ... which the Lord has promised no one can take from us (Jn 16:22).... A missionary joy: priestly joy is deeply bound up with God's holy and faithful people: ... for baptizing and confirming them, healing and sanctifying them, blessing, comforting and evangelizing them" (EE).

Recall that the first major document issued by Pope Francis was *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). For Francis, "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.... With Christ joy is constantly born anew.... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy" (EG 1).

Hidden in this first apostolic exhortation by Francis are several creative expressions to remind us of the centrality of joy in our apostolate. "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter" (EG 6). "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has

just come back from a funeral” (EG 10). We must be wary of a “tomb psychology” that “transforms Christians into mummies in a museum” (EG 83). Francis quoted Saint John XXIII, asserting that “We feel we must disagree with those prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand” (EG 84). Christians must avoid anything that “turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses’” (EG 85). “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization!” (EG 83).

For Francis, a priest should be a true apostle, “a person who transmits joy everywhere he goes. A heart filled with God is a happy heart that radiates an infectious joy; it is immediately evident! So let us not lose that joyful, humorous and even self-deprecating spirit which makes people amiable even in difficult situations. How beneficial is a good dose of humor! We would do well to recite often the prayer of Saint Thomas More. I say it every day” (HH). The final line of More’s prayer is: “Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke and to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others” (HH).

Pope Francis has fervently implored the Lord for the gift of joy for priests. “On this priestly Thursday I ask the Lord Jesus to preserve the joy sparkling in the eyes of the recently ordained.... Preserve, Lord, in your young priests the joy of going forth, of doing everything as if for the first time, the joy of spending their lives fully for you.... I ask the Lord to confirm the priestly joy of those who have already ministered for some years..., those who bear the burden of the ministry.... I ask the Lord Jesus to make better known the joy of elderly priests, whether healthy or infirm. It is the joy of the Cross.... May they know the joy of handing on the torch, the joy of seeing new generations of their spiritual children, and of hailing the promises from afar, smiling and at peace, in that hope which does not disappoint” (EE).

## VI. Be Committed to Quality Preaching.

Many Catholics were surprised when Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* devoted twenty-five sections to the homily and preaching (EG 135-159). Francis made several straightforward—even blunt—statements about priests and preaching. “The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor’s closeness and ability to communicate to his people” (135). “The homily cannot be a form of entertainment.... It should be brief and avoid taking on the semblance of a speech or a lecture.... If the homily goes on too long, it will affect two characteristic elements of the liturgical celebration: its balance and its rhythm” (138). “Preparation for preaching is so important a task that a prolonged time of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity should be devoted to it.... A preacher who does not prepare is not “spiritual”; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received” (145).

The homily “should not be used to correct errors..., it should not be employed to teach doctrine..., it should not be used to expound various theological opinions..., let us not use it to talk about the latest news” (147). “What is essential is that the preacher be certain that God loves him, that Jesus Christ has saved him and that his love always has the last word” (151). “Preparation for preaching thus becomes an exercise in evangelical discernment” [linking profound faith to contemporary life] (154). “Another feature of a good homily is that it is positive.... Positive preaching always offers hope, points to the future, does not leave us trapped in negativity” (159).

Speaking to newly ordained priests, Francis said: “May your homilies not be boring; may your homilies touch the heart of the people because they come from your heart, because what you are telling them is what you carry in your heart. It is in this way that the Word of God is passed on, and thus your teaching will be a joy and support to Christ’s faithful; the fragrance of your lives will be your testimony” (LL). One readily recalls here the episcopal motto of John Henry Cardinal Newman: *Cor ad cor loquitur* [Heart speaks to heart].

“A good priest can be recognized by the way his people are anointed; this is a clear proof.

When our people are anointed with the oil of gladness, it is obvious: for example, when they leave Mass looking as if they have heard good news. Our people like to hear the Gospel preached with “unction,” they like it when the Gospel we preach touches their daily lives...., when it brings light to moments of extreme darkness.... People thank us because they feel we have prayed over the realities of their everyday lives, their troubles, their joys, their burdens, and their hopes” (AA).

**VII. Carefully Monitor any “Clerical Position or Power” You Possess.**

Perhaps the most pointed address of Pope Francis to alert priests and bishops to some possible pitfalls in their ministry and life is found in his 2014 Christmas message to the Roman Curia (HH). The message was crafted as a kind of “examination of conscience,” following the practice of the Desert Fathers, who prepared “lists” as a preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Francis noted that healing comes about through an awareness of one’s sickness and the personal and communal decision to patiently and perseveringly apply the appropriate remedies.

Francis mentioned some of the probable “diseases and temptations which weaken our service to the Lord,” which can weaken our “vital, personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ.” Mentioning several specific items provides clarity and can foster “a living relationship with God that nourishes and strengthens our communion with others.” The “disease list” of Pope Francis includes fifteen items (HH).

First, there is (1) “the disease of thinking we are “immortal,” “immune,” or downright “in-

dispensable”; ... it is the disease of those who turn into lords and masters and think of themselves as above others and not at their service. It is an effect of the pathology of power, from a superiority complex.” (2) “Another disease is the “Martha complex,” excessive busyness.... Jesus called his disciples to ‘rest a while’.” (3) “Then too there is the disease of mental and spiritual “petrification”; it is found in those who have a heart of stone...., those who lose ‘the sentiments of Jesus’.” (4) “The disease of excessive planning and of functionalism.” (5) “The disease of poor coordination [that arises] once the members lose communion among themselves.”

Pope Francis lists other possible diseases as (6) “spiritual Alzheimer’s disease [which] consists of losing the memory of our personal “salvation history,” our past history with the Lord and our “first love”.... We see it in those who have lost the memory of their encounter with the Lord.” (7) “The disease of rivalry and vainglory ... [which includes] our titles of honor.” (8) “The disease of existential schizophrenia; this is the disease of those who live a double life.” (9) “The disease

of gossiping, grumbling and backbiting.... Brothers, let us be on our guard against the terrorism of gossip!” (10) “The disease of idolizing superiors ... in the hope of gaining their favor.” Such Church leaders “are victims of careerism and opportunism.... They serve thinking only of what they can get and not of what they should give.”

The five final diseases listed by Pope Francis begin with (11) “the disease of indifference to others. This is where each individual thinks only of himself and loses sincerity and warmth of human relationships.” (12) “The disease of

1. *The disease of feeling 'immortal' or 'essential'*
2. *The disease of excessive activity*
3. *The diseases of mental and spiritual 'petrification'*
4. *The disease of overplanning*
5. *The disease of bad coordination*
6. *The disease of spiritual Alzheimer's*
7. *The disease of rivalry and vainglory*
8. *The disease of existential schizophrenia*
9. *The disease of gossip and chatter*
10. *The disease of deifying the leaders*
11. *The disease of indifference to others*
12. *The disease of the funeral face*
13. *The disease of hoarding*
14. *The disease of closed circles*
15. *The disease of worldly profit and exhibitionism*

a lugubrious face. Those glum and dour persons who think that to be serious we have to put on a face of melancholy and severity, and treat others ... with rigor, brusqueness and arrogance.” (13) “The disease of hoarding [when one] tries to fill an existential void in his heart by accumulating material goods, not out of need but only in order to feel secure.” (14) “The disease of closed circles, where belonging to a clique becomes more powerful than belonging to the Body and, in some circumstances, to Christ himself.” Lastly, (15) “the disease of worldly profit, of forms of self-exhibition [which begins when] an apostle turns his service into power, and his power into a commodity in order to gain worldly profit or even greater power.”

“Brothers, these diseases and these temptations are naturally a danger.... We need to be clear that it is only the Holy Spirit who can heal all our infirmities.... Let us ask the Virgin Mary ... to make us love the Church as Christ, her Son and our Lord, loves her, to have the courage to acknowledge that we are sinners in need of his mercy.... And please, do not forget to pray for me! Heartfelt thanks! (HH).

It must be noted that at Christmas 2014 Francis gave a catalogue of fifteen “curial diseases” (which can also infect priests); then in his 2015 Christmas message he spoke about “curial antibiotics.” He used an acrostic analysis of the twelve letters of the word *miseri-cordia* to communicate the core of his positive message, imitating what Matteo Ricci did in his evangelizing initiatives in China. Francis concluded his reflection with the prayer attributed to Blessed Oscar Arnulfo Romero, noting that priests are to be “servants, not Messiahs” (PP).

### **VIII. Capitalize on the “Popular Piety” of the Faithful.**

In his comprehensive apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*), Pope Francis devotes several sections to “the evangelizing power of popular piety” (EG 122-126). Some brief selections capture the thought of the pope.

“Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on. Once looked down upon, popular piety came to be appreciated once more in the decades following the Council. In the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI gave a decisive impulse in this area. There he stated that popular piety “manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know” and that “it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief.” Closer to our own time, Benedict XVI, speaking about Latin America, pointed out that popular piety is “a precious treasure of the Catholic Church,” in which “we see the soul of the Latin American peoples” (EG 123).

“The Aparecida Document [to which Francis contributed much] describes the riches which the Holy Spirit pours forth in popular piety by his gratuitous initiative. On that beloved continent, where many Christians express their faith through popular piety, the bishops also refer to it as “popular spirituality” or “the people’s mysticism.” It is truly “a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly”.... It is “a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries”; it brings with itself the grace of being a missionary, of coming out of oneself and setting out on pilgrimage” (EG 124).

“Underlying popular piety, as a fruit of the inculturated Gospel, is an active evangelizing power which we must not underestimate; to do so would be to fail to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead, we are called to promote and strengthen it, in order to deepen the never-ending process of inculturation. Expressions of popular piety have much to teach us; for those who are capable of reading them, they are a locus theologicus which demands our attention, especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelization” (EG 126).

Before he was elected pope, the then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio spoke in a 2012 lecture about the “theology of the people,” which he holds in high esteem. He explained the inner sense of this “theology of the people,” emphasizing that popular piety is the antithesis

of widespread secularization. This theology is founded on common peoples' culture and devotion, including spirituality and sense of justice; it manifests "the faith of our humble people."

For Cardinal Bergoglio, Latin America is largely characterized by poverty and Christianity; the latter is expressed by various and colorful forms of popular piety such as processions, vigils, and public prayer. He said: "When we approach our people with the gaze of the good shepherd, when we do not come to judge but to love, we can find out that this cultural way to express the Christian faith is still present among us, especially in our poor." He affirmed that "popular spirituality is the original way through which the Holy Spirit has led and continues to lead millions of our brothers."

Cardinal Bergoglio himself promoted various forms of popular piety in Buenos Aires. For example, he popularized the devotion to "Our Lady, Undoer of Knots." He propagated the suggestive image of La Virgen Desatanudos, a title originating in Augsburg, Germany [Maria Knotenlöserin]. He has also popularized the image of the "Sleeping Saint Joseph." Cardinal Tagle of Manila has affirmed that Pope Francis is very comfortable with popular religiosity because it is a means "to strengthen the faith"; in popular piety "the Holy Spirit and the culture of the poor meet." Undoubtedly, popular piety is a rich foundation on which priests can build their pastoral ministry!

### **IX. Be Genuinely Sensitive to Those on the "Fringes" and "Margins."**

From the very beginning of his ministry as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has asserted that a priest's authority is always linked to his service, especially to the care and protection of the poorest, weakest, the least important, the most needy, those readily forgotten, the marginalized, and those on the fringes of society. In Argentina, Francis was known as the "slum bishop" for his regular contact with the poor; he believes that such service is the most concrete way of serving Jesus. As Pope he

has gone to the jail for juveniles in Rome; he has traveled to the southern Italian island of Lampedusa to be in solidarity with the numerous migrants, many of whom have died in their effort to get to Europe.

"As priests, we identify with people who are excluded, people the Lord saves. We remind ourselves that there are countless masses of people who are poor, uneducated, prisoners, who find themselves in such situations because others oppress them. But, we too remember that each of us knows the extent to which we too are often blind.... Jesus comes to redeem us, to send us out, to transform us from being poor and blind, imprisoned and oppressed, to become ministers of mercy and consolation" (QQ).

"As priests, we are witnesses to and ministers of the ever-increasing abundance of the Father's mercy; we have the rewarding and consoling task of incarnating mercy, as Jesus did, who "went about doing good and healing" (Acts 10:38) in a thousand ways so that it could touch everyone. We can help to inculcate mercy, so that each person can embrace it and experience it personally" (QQ).

Francis asserts that priests need a "priestly gaze" which enables them to "see people with the eyes of mercy. It has to be learned from seminary on, and it must enrich all our pastoral plans and projects.... We have to let ourselves be moved by people's situation, which at times is a mixture of their own doing, human weakness, sin and insuperable conditions. We have to be like Jesus, who was deeply moved at the sight of people and their problems.... He healed people, forgave their sins, eased their suffering, gave them rest and made them feel the consoling breath of the Spirit" (VV).

Addressing bishops, priests, and religious in the Manila Cathedral in 2015, Francis emphasized the challenge to serve the poor and needy, "those living in the midst of a society burdened by poverty and corruption, tempted to give up." The clergy faces the "challenge of proclaiming the radicalism of the Gospel in a society which has grown comfortable with social exclusion, polarization, and scandalous inequality"; they must remember that "the poor are at the center of the Gospel, are at the

heart of the Gospel; if we take away the poor from the Gospel we cannot understand the whole message of Jesus Christ” (II). In short, for Pope Francis “all of us are asked to obey His [Jesus’] call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20).

### **X. In Everything, Be a Genuine “Missionary Disciple.”**

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis proposes a profound missionary renewal of the entire Church; certainly the clergy are central to this renewal. Francis asserts that we need an “evangelizing Church that comes out of herself,” not a Church that is “self-referential” and “lives within herself, of herself, for herself.” “I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.... All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG 27).

“Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity.... We need to move ‘from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry’” (EG 15). “I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has programmatic significance and important consequences.... Throughout the world, let us be “permanently in a state of mission” (EG 25).

A pivotal insight of Pope Francis is that “we are all missionary disciples” (EG 119); through baptism, “all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (EG 120). All Christians are “agents of evangelization.” “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries,” but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (EG 120). “May the world

of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ (EG 10; cf. EN 75).

Francis asserts: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (EG 8; cf. Benedict XV). For Pope Francis, every Christian “ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized” (EG 164). In Chapter Two (EG 50-109), Francis focuses on the challenges facing the proclamation of the Gospel today; the pope asserts: “Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor” (EG 109). Or again, “I repeat: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization” (EG 83).

### **Conclusion**

This modest presentation has sought to highlight ten pivotal characteristics emerging from Pope Francis’ profound vision of the priesthood. For the sake of clarity, the copious material of Francis has been thematically arranged under ten foundational insights that form an integrated whole. Another writer may have chosen a different

style of presentation. However, what remains crucial is for readers to penetrate the insightful wisdom of Pope Francis; truly, this thematic arrangement is quite secondary to the original papal material.

The thought of Pope Francis on the priesthood emerges from his deep convictions. Early in his pontificate Francis wrote: “Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified..., we realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without

this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity” (EG 268). Again in his message for World Mission Sunday 2015, Francis asserted: “Mission is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a passion for his people.” In his address to the 2016 assembly of the Pontifical Missionary Societies, Francis spoke of “the passion for God and for the mission of the

Church”; he left his audience (and us) with a clear challenge:

“We must grow in evangelizing passion!” (XX).

### **Pivotal Bibliographical Sources**

**Introduction.** The material by Pope Francis on the Priesthood is extremely rich and plentiful. It is available to readers in a variety of internet and printed sources; often the very same document is found in various digital and printed forms. To facilitate the documentation of the quotes of Pope Francis in this presentation, a simple reference system is employed. Each of the cited documents containing specific “priesthood material” from Pope Francis is identified with double letters of the alphabet; an interested researcher could easily locate the specific document, no matter in what format or language it appears. All one needs to do is to check this bibliography to find the date and description of a specific document of the pope. In the text of this presentation, only the double letters appear at the end of a given quote. Hopefully, this simple approach avoids an overly complicated and cumbersome manner of documentation, while providing the source of the specific quote from Pope Francis. The material appearing below is presented in chronological order, beginning in 2013 and extending to 2016.

AA - March 28, 2013: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica

BB - April 21, 2013: Ordination Homily of ten priests in Saint Peter’s Basilica

CC - November 24, 2013: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*

DD - 2013: Book by Jorge Bergoglio and Abraham Skorcka: *On Heaven and Earth*

EE - April 17, 2014: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica

FF - May 11, 2014: Ordination Homily of thirteen priests in Saint Peter’s Basilica

GG - June 6, 2014: Morning Mass Homily in Casa Santa Marta

HH - December 22, 2014: Address to the Roman Curia

II - January 16, 2015: Homily to the Clergy in the Manila Cathedral

JJ - February 14, 2015: Address at Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals

KK - April 2, 2015: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica

LL - April 26, 2015: Ordination Homily of nineteen new priests in Saint Peter’s Basilica

MM - May 2, 2015: Homily at North American College in Rome to celebrate “Pope’s Day”

NN - August 6, 2015: Homily on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

OO - November 20, 2015: Speech to Conference on “Priesthood” Documents of Vatican II

PP - December 21, 2015: Address to the Roman Curia

QQ - March 24, 2016: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica

RR - April 17, 2016: Homily to Priests on World Day of Prayer for Vocations

SS - May 29, 2016: Homily at Jubilee for Deacons

TT - June 2, 2016: First Meditation at Jubilee for Priests

UU - June 2, 2016: Second Meditation at Jubilee for Priests

VV - June 2, 2016: Third Meditation at Jubilee for Priests

WW - June 3, 2016: Homily at Mass for Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

XX - June 4, 2016: Address to Assembly of the Pontifical Missionary Societies

***We thank the author who sent this article to be published in the Sedos Bulletin.***

## **Las tres ramas troncales del árbol de la pastoral** sacerdote, profeta, rey

La naturaleza íntima de la Iglesia se expresa en una triple tarea: anuncio de la Palabra de Dios (kerygma-martyria), celebración de los Sacramentos (leiturgia) y servicio de la caridad (diakonia). Son tareas que se implican mutuamente y no pueden separarse una de otra (DCE 25).

Seguimos en “la naturaleza íntima de la Iglesia”, es decir, en su ser comunión, en vivir la comunión y en hacerla visible en su acción. Esta visibilidad en la acción tiene tres tareas, “tres ramas del tronco”, siguiendo la imagen elegida para este trabajo.

En la Iglesia, actuamos pastoralmente todos unidos porque todos participamos, por el bautismo, de la triple función de Cristo: Sacerdote, Profeta y Rey, de su triple oficio, en lenguaje más pobre según mi opinión, o, en lenguaje técnico latino, el triple munus. “La Iglesia tiene, como misión propia y específica, comunicar la vida de Jesucristo a todas las personas, anunciando la Palabra, administrando los Sacramentos y practicando la caridad” (AP 386).<sup>1</sup>

Que la Iglesia sea la continuadora de las tres misiones de Cristo es algo evidente para el cristiano. Es suficiente con recordar estas frases evangélicas para comprender a la Iglesia como continuadora de la obra, de la triple misión de Cristo: “Como el Padre me ha enviado, yo también los envío a ustedes” (Jn 20,21). La misión recibida por Jesús del Padre es la misma que encomienda a la Iglesia.

### **1. Cristo, sacerdote, profeta y rey**

Estamos hablando de las tres funciones o misiones que Cristo ha encarnado y que la teología ha recogido desde siempre. Es el triple título de Cristo Sacerdote, Profeta y Rey. Triple misión que ha recibido la Iglesia como continuadora en el tiempo de la misión

de Jesús. Tres misiones, siempre unidas e inseparables, en relación que la teología de la Iglesia ha definido como leiturgia, martyria y diakonía. Acción litúrgica, acción profética, acción servicial. Las tres deben encarnarse en el “espíritu” de Jesús, del Evangelio, que es la koinonía, de la que ya hemos hablado, como el ámbito necesario en la vida y acción de la Iglesia, el estilo y modo natural, el aire-espíritu en el que la Iglesia debe siempre actuar. La koinonía-comunión no es un vago afecto personal, sino una realidad interior que procede de la comunión íntima y diversa en la unidad trinitaria y que debe expresarse de forma adecuada e importante en la vida y en las realizaciones eclesiales y pastorales.

A. Ser sacerdote, según el NT, es ofrecer toda la vida al Padre: “Les pido, pues, hermanos, por la misericordia de Dios, que se ofrezcan como sacrificio vivo, santo y agradable a Dios, Este debe ser su auténtico culto” (Rm 12,1). Hacer de la vida toda la vida, un culto agradable a Dios. Porque así fue el sacerdocio de Cristo del que participa, y cuya misión continúa Iglesia y, en ella, cada bautizado.

La ofrenda permanente de Cristo se hizo total y definitiva en la entrega de la vida en la cruz. La cruz es el signo supremo de cómo Cristo hizo de su vida una ofrenda obediente agradable al Padre. “Por eso, al entrar en este mundo, dice Cristo: no has querido sacrificio ni ofrenda, pero me has formado un cuerpo; no has aceptado holocaustos ni sacrificios por el pecado. Entonces yo dije: Aquí vengo, oh Dios, para hacer tu voluntad” (Hb 10,5-7).

Cristo es el Único y Sumo Sacerdote.<sup>2</sup> Porque hizo de su persona y de toda su vida una ofrenda agradable al Padre. Ofrenda que encontró su plena expresión en la entrega por amor hasta la cruz. Leamos detenidamente estas frases del entonces joven teólogo Joseph

Ratzinger, hoy Benedicto XVI. Iluminan a la perfección el sacerdocio de Cristo del que participamos todos los cristianos por el bautismo.

El que, desde la perspectiva del derecho religioso, era un simple laico, que no desempeñaba ninguna función en el culto de Israel, era el único verdadero sacerdote. Su muerte, un acontecimiento totalmente profano desde el punto de vista histórico -condena de un criminal político- fue en realidad la única liturgia de la historia humana, una liturgia cósmica por la que Jesús entró en el templo real, es decir, en la presencia de Dios, no en el ámbito restringido de la escena cúllica, en el templo, sino ante los ojos del mundo. Por su muerte no ofreció cosas, sangre de animales o cualquier otra cosa, sino que se ofreció a sí mismo (Hb 9, 11ss.).

Observemos el cambio fundamental que se ha operado en la carta a los hebreos y que constituye su idea central: lo que desde una perspectiva terrena era un acontecimiento profano, es en realidad el verdadero culto de la humanidad, pues quien lo hizo traspasó el espacio de la escena litúrgica e hizo verdad: se entregó a sí mismo.<sup>3</sup>

**B. Santificado en el bautismo** (lo que le constituye en participante del sacerdocio de Cristo, es decir, en sacerdote), ungido en la confirmación, el cristiano está llamado a anunciar a Cristo y a vivir lo que anuncia. Es constituido profeta y llamado a ser profeta, unido a la Iglesia, llamada a ser profecía viva en cada tiempo y lugar.

Ser profeta consiste en: anunciar y testimoniar con la vida y la palabra a Cristo y nuestra fe en Él, iluminar la vida de la persona humana y la realidad del mundo y de la historia desde la Palabra de Dios, denunciar lo negativo del mundo, lo que se opone al plan salvador de Dios y afirmar, proclamar y defender la esperanza creyente del triunfo de todo lo bueno, noble y justo. Ser profeta es ser testigo.

Así lo reconocieron en Jesús los que lo vieron actuar y hablar y se acercaron a Él con limpieza y sencillez de corazón: “Un gran profeta ha surgido entre nosotros; Dios ha visitado a su pueblo” (Lc 7,16). Jesús “fue un profeta poderoso en obras y palabras ante Dios y ante todo el pueblo” (Lc 24,19). De esta mane-

ra lo presentan los discípulos de Emaús al “Desconocido” que se les acerca. Aunque estaban decepcionados por el final de la vida de Jesús, no podían dejar de reconocer que había sido un gran profeta que hablaba en nombre de Dios (cf. Lc 24,13-35).

Jesús nos constituyó a todos los que íbamos a creer en Él como profetas y nos dio “autoridad” para actuar como tales: “Ustedes recibirán la fuerza del Espíritu Santo: él vendrá sobre ustedes para que sean mis testigos en Jerusalén, en toda Judea, en Samaría y hasta los extremos de la tierra” (Hch 1,8).

**C. Santificado en el bautismo, ungido en la confirmación y alimentado en la Eucaristía, el cristiano, en la Iglesia y con la Iglesia, la servidora que encarna el servicio del Señor, está llamado a servir a sus hermanos desde el amor, la entrega y la transformación de la sociedad.**

Ser rey,<sup>4</sup> según el modo de ser de Cristo, consiste en: salir de sí mismo, de los exclusivos intereses personales, del propio provecho y ponerse al servicio de los demás defendiendo su dignidad humana y de hijos de Dios. “Jesús es Cristo, es rey en cuanto crucificado. Su crucifixión es su realeza, su realeza es el don de sí mismo a los hombres, es la identidad de palabra, misión y existencia justamente en la renuncia a su existencia”.<sup>5</sup>

El servir es la verdadera forma de reinar y nos deja presentir algo de cómo Dios es Señor, del “reinado de Dios”. En la pasión y en la muerte, la vida del Hijo del hombre se convierte también en “pro-existencia” (existir para los demás); se convierte en liberador y salvador para “todos”: no sólo para los hijos de Israel dispersos, sino para todos los hijos de Dios dispersos (cf. Jn 11,52), para la humanidad.<sup>6</sup>

“¡Dios reinó desde el madero!”. Ésta es la exclamación de la Iglesia ante el modo sorprendente de ejercer Dios su soberanía sobre todo lo creado. Porque Dios es amor y el amor es entrega total al otro. El icono, imagen sagrada, del señorío de Cristo es Cristo lavando los pies a sus discípulos (cf. Jn 13). La definición de su señorío nos la da el mismo Cristo: “Yo estoy entre ustedes como el que sirve” (Lc 22,27). Su trono es la cruz –expresión del

amor más grande-, su corona es de espinas - burla de los entienden el señorío de otra manera- y su cetro, una can manto real es una capa sucia. Y lo presentó Pilatos sin saberlo: “¡Éste es el hombre!”. “¡Aquí tienen a su rey!” (Jn 19,5.14). Este es el camino “regio” (“se humilló a sí mismo haciéndose obediente hasta la muerte, y una muerte de cruz” - Flp 2,8) que lleva a la gloria del “señorío definitivo” (“Por eso Dios lo exaltó y le dio el nombre sobre todo nombre... y toda lengua proclame que Jesucristo es Señor para gloria de Dios Padre”. - Flp 2,9.11). Sólo confesamos el señorío glorioso de Cristo cuando servimos “hasta la cruz”, como Él, a nuestros hermanos y a todos.

Todo cristiano recibe esa misma misión, ese mismo de estar en el mundo en relación con los demás: “Si yo, que el Maestro y el Señor, les he lavado los pies, ustedes deben lo mismo unos con otros” (Jn 13,16). “El mayor de ustedes el que sirva a los demás” (Mt 23,11).

Ser rey para la Iglesia y en ella, para el cristiano, será tanto, lavar los pies a los demás, ponerse a su servicio atenta a sus necesidades, hacerse solidaria con los últimos, opción preferencial por los pobres, como Cristo el rey por excelencia, el modelo de rey. Podemos concretar la realeza de la Iglesia y del cristiano, sin forzar para nada el sentido, con estas recomendaciones de San Pablo en su carta a los romanos:

Les digo, además, a todos y cada uno de ustedes, en virtud de la gracia que Dios me ha confiado, que no se consideren más de lo debido, sino que cada uno se considere en lo que vale, conforme al grado de fe que Dios le ha concedido... Apréciense unos a otros como hermanos y sean los primeros en estimarse unos a otros... Compartan las necesidades de los creyentes; practiquen la hospitalidad. Bendigan a quienes los persigan; bendigan y no maldigan. Alégrense con los que se alegran; lloren con los que lloran. Vivan en armonía unos con otros y no sean envidiosos, antes bien pónganse al nivel de los sencillos. Y no sean autosuficientes. A nadie devuelvan mal por mal; procuren hacer el bien ante todos los hombres. Hagan lo posible, en cuanto de ustedes dependa, por vivir en paz con todos. No te dejes vencer por el mal; por el contrario, ven-

ce al mal a fuerza de bien (Rm 12,3.10.13-17.21).

Ser “el mayor” para la Iglesia no es otra cosa que servir humildemente al mundo. Ser “el mayor” para el cristiano-rey consiste en servir a todos los demás. El mayor no se mide por la dignidad sobre los demás sino por su servicio y entrega. Curioso y sorprendente para este mundo y para los cristianos, este modo de ser “rey”.

El Concilio Vaticano II, LG 36 a, expresa así el concepto de realeza aplicado a Cristo y al cristiano: “Cristo se hizo obediente hasta la muerte y por esto el Padre lo exaltó y entró en la gloria de su reino” Cristo manifestó su realeza en la entrega, en el servicio hasta la muerte. Así se constituyó realmente como Rey. Como se ha dicho sencillamente: Cristo es el-hombre-para-los demás. O, como lo dice Pablo: “se despojó de su grandeza, tomó la condición de esclavo y se hizo semejante a los hombres. Y en su condición de hombre, se humilló a sí mismo haciéndose obediente hasta la muerte, y una muerte de cruz” (Flp 2,7-8). La glorificación, la manifestación de su ser profundo, divino, vendrá después. Algo que olvidamos los cristianos con demasiada facilidad, ligereza y por intereses de una fe cómoda y absentista de la realidad, cuando solamente celebramos, ponderamos y enfatizamos este aspecto último, tan verdadero como el de la cruz y el lavatorio de los pies, pero que será “al final”. Por eso este final es lo que nos sostiene en la esperanza cuando nuestro servicio es rechazado, ridiculizado o perseguido. El “trono” de la cruz, mientras estamos peregrinando en el mundo, no puede ser sustituido por el “trono glorioso” del Apocalipsis y de tantas imágenes y representaciones de Jesús.

“Él comunicó este poder a sus discípulos para que también ellos dispusieran de una libertad soberana y vencieran en sí mismos, con la propia renuncia y una vida santa, al reino del pecado” (LG 36a). El cristiano recibe esa misma misión de Cristo. Manifiesta y cumple con su nueva realidad de rey liberándose de la esclavitud y sometimiento a las cosas temporales: gloria, fama, dinero, superficialidad, dominio sobre todo el que podemos... De esta manera, el cristiano-rey vence el reino del mal.

“Sirviendo a Cristo también en los demás, podrán llevar a sus hermanos, por medio de la paciencia y de la humildad, al Rey, a quien servir es reinar” (LG 36a). No hay duda, pues que se ejerce el reinado sirviendo a los demás como Cristo y llevándolos al mismo Cristo.

En resumen, todos los bautizados estamos llamados a continuar la función real del Mesías, anunciada en el Antiguo Testamento y realizada definitivamente por Jesús:

traer paz y justicia a los hombres, defender al débil, al oprimido, al que carece de dignidad, al huérfano y a la viuda. La función real es una gran responsabilidad porque es la obra del que quiere traer paz y justicia a la humanidad, y el cristiano la puede ejercer sólo obedeciendo a un criterio muy determinado: modelando su realeza sobre la de Jesús crucificado, el Mesías que “reina desde el madero”. Sí, los cristianos son pueblo mesiánico sólo cuando y si aceptan la cruz, como su Señor, que fue proclamado rey de los judíos sólo en la cruz (cf. Jn 19,19).<sup>7</sup>

Todo esto el cristiano lo vive y lo celebra en la Eucaristía. Ella es el sacramento que actualiza la ofrenda, el sacrificio, de Cristo. En ella, Cristo nos dejó el memorial de su pasión y de su resurrección. El memorial de su entrega total. Ahora la Eucaristía es para nosotros el “hagan esto en memoria mía” (Le 22,19). “Hacer esto en memoria mía” no significa solamente repetir los mismos gestos de Jesús (bendecir, partir, dar el pan), sino que significa de modo completo: “hagan lo mismo que yo he hecho en mi vida y que ahora se les dejo en el pan, cuerpo entregado, y en el vino, sangre redamada. La Eucaristía no es un simple rito -eso sería no haber entendido a Jesús-, sino la entrega de Jesús que hoy se prolonga en la entrega de sus discípulos a todos en actitud de servicio “real”, de reyes.



## 2. La Iglesia, continuadora y presencia de Cristo Sacerdote, Profeta y Rey

La misión sacerdotal de la Iglesia, su misión litúrgica, responde a la mediación sacerdotal de Cristo. Una mediación que no es cultural solamente, sino existencial. La vida ofrecida se celebra en el Sacramento. Así la Iglesia es sacerdotal como Cristo lo fue. En los Sacramentos actúa el Cristo en el Espíritu para gloria del Padre en bien de los hermanos y del mundo.

La Iglesia sacerdotal actualiza la presencia de Cristo en ella y en el mundo, puesto que Jesucristo ha previsto ser recordado con palabras

y con símbolos, gestos y acciones, vivificados por el Espíritu Santo. Así el recuerdo de Jesucristo toma un carácter real, de algo que sucede realmente, el recuerdo se hace presencia y acción de Jesús por medio del Espíritu

Santo. Y este recuerdo-memorial toma una dimensión de fiesta y celebración no sólo de Jesucristo, sino también de la realidad existencial humana, situándola en el marco comunitario pascual y de esperanza escatológica. Esta misión sacerdotal, no exclusivamente litúrgica, interpela a toda la Iglesia y a cada uno de los fieles para que hagan de su vida un sacrificio espiritual (es decir, en el Espíritu) que sea agradable a Dios (cf. Rm 12,1-2).

Y es principalmente en la Eucaristía donde todas las dimensiones del sacerdocio único de Cristo y el participado de la Iglesia y de cada cristiano, como miembro de ella, encuentran su vínculo de unión.

La misión profética responde a la necesidad de la mediación salvífica de la Palabra de Dios. Tiene una dimensión de primer anuncio de la Palabra (evangelización), una dimensión de acompañamiento pedagógico posterior, o iluminador de toda la existencia humana creyente (catequesis y formación permanente posterior) y una dimensión crítica de todo aquello que en este mundo se opone a la dignidad humana y de hijo de Dios de toda persona y de todo aquello que no responde en la

pastoral de la Iglesia a la Palabra de Dios y al mundo actual.<sup>8</sup>

Esta misión profética se basa en la Palabra de Dios que la Iglesia acoge en su vida, conserva, anuncia, hace viva en cada momento de la historia. Esa misma Palabra que lleva a la Iglesia a proponer un mundo nuevo sin miedo al juicio crítico sobre la realidad, siempre tan lejana del Proyecto de Dios, del Reino de Dios.

La relación entre Cristo, Palabra del Padre, y la Iglesia no puede ser comprendida como si fuera solamente un acontecimiento pasado, sino que es una relación vital, en la cual cada fiel está llamado a entrar personalmente. En efecto, hablamos de la presencia de la Palabra de Dios entre nosotros hoy: “Y sabed que yo estoy con vosotros todos los días, hasta al fin del mundo” (Mt 28,20). [...] La Constitución dogmática *Dei Verbum* expresa este misterio en los términos bíblicos de un diálogo nupcial: “Dios, que habló en otros tiempos, sigue conversando siempre con la esposa de su Hijo amado; y el Espíritu Santo, por quien la voz viva del Evangelio resuena en la Iglesia, y por ella en el mundo, va introduciendo a los fieles en la verdad plena y hace que habite en ellos intensamente la palabra de Cristo (cf. Col 3,16)” (DV 8).

La Esposa de Cristo, maestra también hoy en la escucha, repite con fe: “Habla, Señor, que tu Iglesia te escucha”. Por eso, la Constitución dogmática *Dei Verbum* 1 comienza diciendo: “La Palabra de Dios la escucha con devoción y la proclama con valentía el santo Concilio”. En efecto, se trata de una definición dinámica de la vida de la Iglesia: “Son palabras con las que el Concilio indica un aspecto que distingue a la Iglesia. La Iglesia no vive de sí misma, sino del Evangelio, y en el Evangelio encuentra siempre de nuevo orientación para su camino. Es una consideración que todo cristiano debe hacer y aplicarse a sí mismo: sólo quien se pone primero a la escucha de la Palabra, puede convertirse después en su heraldo”. En la Palabra de Dios proclamada y escuchada, y en los sacramentos, Jesús dice hoy, aquí y ahora, a cada uno: “Yo soy tuyo, me entrego a ti”, para que el hombre pueda recibir y responder, y decir a su vez: “Yo soy tuyo”. La Iglesia aparece así en ese ámbito en que, por

gracia, podemos experimentar lo que dice el Prólogo de Juan: “Pero a cuantos la recibieron, les da poder para ser hijos de Dios”(Jn 1,12) (VD51).<sup>9</sup>

## 1. La Caridad Pastoral

La misión real, servicial, u organización pastoral de la Iglesia debe realizarse, encarnarse, en el espíritu de la realeza de Cristo que veíamos más arriba. Esto es lo básico y fundamental. Este espíritu de realeza se hace visible en la comúnmente llamada caridad pastoral.

No sólo la misión real de la Iglesia, sino las tres grandes misiones de la Iglesia deben estar siempre animadas por la caridad pastoral, por la actitud acogedora y entregada de los agentes de pastoral. Sin ella la acción pastoral se convertiría en una pura estrategia o en una simple ideología, pero la Iglesia y los agentes de pastoral no realizarían la misión que les ha encomendado el Señor.

En la cumbre de los carismas del Espíritu y resumiéndolos todos, san Pablo coloca el amor: “Aspirad a los carismas superiores, y aun os voy a mostrar un camino más excelente” (1Co 12,31)- Más que un carisma entre tantos, aquí hay la plenitud del Espíritu sin la cual ningún don, aunque sea el más sublime (el conocimiento, la fe, el martirio, los milagros), tiene ningún valor. El amor es así el lazo de unión, el tejido que vivifica los ministerios, que les emparenta con el ministerio del Único, del Siervo.<sup>10</sup>

En definitiva, la calidad pastoral depende de la capacidad de amor (caridad pastoral) que mueve las actuaciones pastorales. Es el amor quien realiza la esperanza en el interior de la historia, y es la esperanza quien manifiesta la fe.

Podemos decir, pues, que es este criterio pastoral el que puede unir y dar sentido a todas las acciones, programas y proyectos pastorales y también el que puede anularlos e inutilizarlos. Él puede hacer que, teniendo experiencia del amor, el mundo pueda conocer a Dios que es amor (cf. 1 Jn 4,8).

Una auténtica evangelización de nuestros pueblos implica asumir plenamente la radicalidad del amor cristiano, que se concreta en el seguimiento de Cristo en la Cruz; en el pade-

cer por Cristo (AP 543)<sup>11</sup> a causa de la justicia; en el perdón y amor a los enemigos. Este amor supera al amor humano y participa en el amor divino, único eje cultural capaz de construir una cultura de la vida. En el Dios Trinidad la diversidad de Personas no genera violencia y conflicto, sino que es la misma fuente de amor y de vida. Una evangelización que pone la Redención en el centro, nacida de un amor crucificado, es capaz de purificar las estructuras de la sociedad violenta y generar nuevas... Evangelizar sobre el amor de plena donación, como solución al conflicto, debe ser el eje cultural “radical” de una nueva sociedad (AP 543).

## 2. Los proyectos de Pastoral

La misión real de la Iglesia responde, en su organización pastoral, a la necesidad de mediaciones (estructuras, funciones, misiones) históricas y pedagógicas. Unas han estado “previstas”, “prefiguradas”, “preanunciadas” por el mismo Jesucristo y proceden de la Iglesia del NT (p.e. ministerio pastoral, servicios a los pobres, catequistas...); otras proceden de las nuevas necesidades surgidas en la vida de la comunidad cristiana. Todas estas mediaciones han de acompañar hacia el aprendizaje de la manera de vivir de Jesucristo. De esta manera la comunidad se hace presente públicamente en el interior de su vida en cada tiempo y situación, mediante los proyectos pastorales, fruto de la comunión pastoral intraeclesial, de cara a realizar la misión recibida del mismo Cristo.

La acción pastoral de la Iglesia no tiene otra finalidad que hacer presente la persona y el mensaje de Jesús en cada momento de la historia y en cada comunidad humana, para el encuentro-conversión a Jesucristo y la entrada en su comunidad, la Iglesia, de aquel que acepta el mensaje. Esto es lo que deben buscar y pretender los diferentes proyectos pastorales.

Estos proyectos han de elaborarse siempre con estos cuatro presupuestos o finalidades:

- reflexión teológica. Los proyectos son para anunciar la fe de la Iglesia, el Misterio de Dios revelado y ofrecido. Sin una buena teología de fondo, no se pueden elaborar buenos proyectos pastorales.

- reflexión sobre la actuación-situación de la Iglesia o comunidad eclesial que elabora el proyecto. Para conocer sus aspectos positivos, negativos o carencias. Los proyectos pastorales deben nacer de la reflexión sobre la Iglesia en su acción concreta, en su vida interior apostólica.

- conocimiento de la realidad en la que y a la que evangeliza, sobre la situación del mundo en el que vive y en el que debe ser sacramento de salvación.

- todo para cumplir su misión, hoy y aquí, de continuar el plan de salvación de Dios, para ser fiel a la misión encomendada por el su Señor. De ahí que sea absolutamente imprescindible que los responsables y los agentes de pastoral conozcan y sepan en qué mundo están, cuáles son los condicionamientos sociales, culturales, políticos, económicos y religiosos de la sociedad; qué valores y contravalores son los que organizan y dirigen a la sociedad.

Por eso, la comunidad cristiana realiza el anuncio de Jesús cuando se convierte en una mediación real, encarnada en la realidad, entre la Palabra de Dios y las aspiraciones, expectativas, necesidades... de las personas. Es necesario, por tanto, conocerlas para que la acción pastoral de la Iglesia evangelice al mundo y transforme su vida interior para convertirse en mejor y más clara servidora de la humanidad. Esta misión mediadora la realiza la Iglesia en una doble dirección: yendo desde la Palabra de Dios hacia la vida y retornando desde la vida a la Palabra de Dios. Desde este punto de vista se ha de disponer a ser una mediadora realista y transparente, lo cual supone serenidad, humildad, reforma constante y valentía fiel al Señor.

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### 3. Actitud Misionera

La vida y la misión de la Iglesia no son posibles sin la apertura positiva al mundo. La Iglesia ha de salir de ella misma para poder ser Iglesia. Esta apertura y conexión de los cristianos con el mundo y con la historia es el corazón de la misión evangelizadora de la Iglesia. La Iglesia o bien es misionera o bien tiene el peligro de dejar de ser Iglesia. La dimensión misionera de la Iglesia emerge en el mundo contemporáneo como la prioridad más urgente.

La Iglesia mediadora no es un fin en sí misma, sino para el Reino de Dios, a cuyo servicio ha sido formada. Su grandeza está en su capacidad de fidelidad a la Palabra de Dios, a la persona humana y a la comunidad eclesial y humana. Esta fidelidad supone transmitir íntegramente el mensaje de salvación captando las intuiciones y las necesidades del mundo contemporáneo. Esta tarea sólo es posible como gracia y, por lo tanto, mediante la fe. En consecuencia, la actitud clave de la Iglesia como comunidad trascendente, que nace y vive de Dios y que ha sido convocada para anunciar el amor de Dios, es la actitud misionera. Esta es la responsabilidad de la Iglesia y la responsabilidad personal de cada cristiano unido al trabajo solidario-comunal de toda la comunidad. Esta actitud misionera exige estar presente, de una manera servicial y martirial, en los núcleos vitales de la sociedad. Asimismo esta actitud y presencia misionera en el mundo pide que todos en la Iglesia seamos sujetos evangelizadores. Ser sujetos y no objetos pasivos nos llevará a todos los cristianos, dentro y fuera de la Iglesia, a alimentar nuestra fe, para poder

superar los propios fallos y contradicciones y para poder vivir en esperanza teologal.

Por tanto, la acción pastoral de la Iglesia ha de mantenerse en esta triple misión de Cristo, entregada a la Iglesia y en total fidelidad a ellas, que es uno de los modos necesarios de ser fiel al Señor, si quiere asegurar sus raíces y conservar la memoria y la presencia de Cristo en cada momento de la historia. Esto tiene una importante consecuencia: hemos de distinguir los elementos básicos fundamentales de aquellos otros que no son sino expresión de un determinado contexto cultural, de una época determinada o de una peculiar zona geográfica. Estos segundos no son esenciales, aunque sí muy importantes en el conocimiento de la realidad, y, por ello, la reflexión y la acción pastoral ha de ejercer sobre ellos una función crítica, especialmente sobre aquellos que son fruto de un pasado para el que sirvieron, pero que hoy ya no sirven.

Es la necesaria conversión pastoral de la que nos habla con energía y a la que nos convoca con frecuencia el documento de la V Conferencia General del CELAM en Aparecida:

La conversión personal despierta la capacidad de someterlo todo al servicio de la instauración del Reino de la vida. Obispos, presbíteros, diáconos permanentes, consagrados y consagradas, laicos y laicas, estamos llamados a asumir una actitud de permanente conversión pastoral, que implica escuchar con atención y discernir “lo que el Espíritu está diciendo a las Iglesias” (Ap 2,29) a través de los signos de los tiempos en los que Dios se manifiesta (AP 366).

El mensaje de Aparecida la concreta pidiendo “entrar decididamente, con todas sus fuerzas, en los procesos constantes de renovación misionera, y de abandonar las estructuras caducas que ya no favorecen la transmisión de la fe” (AP 365). Nos convoca, así mismo, a pasar de “una pastoral de mera conservación a una pastoral decididamente misionera” (AP 370).

### Conclusión que continúa

Estas tres misiones de Cristo, de la Iglesia y de cada bautizado las he llamado “ramas del tronco de la pastoral”. Quiero decir con ello, claro está, que las tres son troncales, centrales.

Esto significa sencillamente que en toda pastoral, sea fundamental, general o especial, deben estar siempre presentes: la misión profética, la litúrgica y la real-servicial. A las que hemos añadido una cuarta dimensión: la misionera, y el ambiente-espíritu en que toda pastoral debe “nadar”: la comunal o koinonía. Todas estas dimensiones pertenecen al ser de la Iglesia que se vive y se actúa en la pastoral. No se puede plantear cuál de ellas es la más importante teológica o eclesialmente. Todas son necesarias e imprescindibles. El olvido de una de ellas afecta a las otras.

Así como la persona humana no puede prescindir de los órganos fisiológicos básicos sin provocar su muerte, de la misma manera la vida de la Iglesia no puede prescindir de ninguna de estas dimensiones sin poner en peligro la misma supervivencia de la Iglesia. Estas dimensiones troncales son tres. En cada una de ellas y en las tres unidas, hemos de tener presente siempre su finalidad, que es la misión; y la actitud pastoral, que es la caridad pastoral.

Y ahora, sí, podemos pasar al capítulo siguiente que completa el título de este trabajo: la pastoral de conjunto.

**Ref:** *Cuadernos de Teología Pastoral*, Año 2, n°2, 2011, pp. 59-76.

***The English translation of this article can be found in the SEDOS website:***

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<sup>1</sup> Creo que hubiera sido mejor decir celebrando los Sacramentos que administrando los Sacramentos. Los Sacramentos son celebraciones del Señor que actúa, celebraciones de la fe. La “administración” da la sensación de que los Sacramentos son “cosas” que se dan y que, por tanto, se administran

<sup>2</sup> “El Único”. Los cristianos a los que llamamos “sacerdotes” les cuadra mejor, según el NT, el nombre de “presbíteros”. Usando correctamente esta distinta denominación, no tendríamos que repetir constantemente que la diferencia entre el sacerdocio común y el sacerdocio de los presbíteros se diferencian “esencialmente”. “Su diferencia -la del sacerdocio ministerial- es esencial y no sólo de grado. En efecto, el sacerdocio ministerial, por el poder sagrado del

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que goza, configura y dirige al pueblo sacerdotal, realiza como representante de Cristo el sacrificio eucarístico, y lo ofrece a Dios en nombre de todo el pueblo. Los fieles, en cambio, participan en la celebración de la Eucaristía en virtud de su sacerdocio real, y lo ejercen al recibir los sacramentos, en la oración y en la acción de gracias, con el testimonio de una vida santa, con la renuncia y el amor que se traduce en obras” (LG 10 b). Quizás todas estas explicaciones no serían necesarias, ni crearían interminables discusiones, si reserváramos el concepto y la palabra “sacerdote” a Cristo, el Único Sacerdote, y a todos los cristianos cuyo sacerdocio nace del bautismo. Los que hoy llamamos “sacerdotes” serían identificados como “presbíteros”.

<sup>3</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introducción al cristianismo*, Sígueme, Salamanca, 2005, p. 237

<sup>4</sup> La palabra “rey”, aplicada a Cristo y a los cristianos, tiene una significación y sentido

totalmente distintos al que se aplica a los reyes de este mundo como jefes de estado o como primeras figuras en algún aspecto de las actividades humanas, p.e., del fútbol, de la moda, de las finanzas, de la belleza... humanamente significa poder, importancia, superioridad... Evangélicamente es todo lo contrario. Por eso Jesús rechaza el título cuando se lo quieren atribuir en ese sentido (cf. Jn 6,15). Y lo acepta cuando está humillado, azotado y coronado de espinas ante Pilatos (cf. Jn 18,37) y se proclama entonces “testigo de la verdad”. Para entender la “realeza” en el sentido de la Palabra de Dios, nos ayuda la lectura y meditación del salmo 72 [71]

<sup>5</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introducción al cristianismo*, ed. cit., p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ratzinger - Benedicto XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret*, Planeta, Bogotá, 2007, p. 385.

<sup>7</sup> E. Bianchi, *Una vida diferente*, San Pablo, Madrid, 2005, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Nuevo Pueblo de Dios*, Herder, Barcelona, 2005, p. 351

<sup>9</sup> Para completar la relación intrínseca entre la Palabra y la Iglesia, podemos leer toda la segunda parte de esta Exhortación Apostólica de Benedicto XVI.

<sup>10</sup> B. Bobrinskoy *El Misterio de la Trinidad*, Secretariado Trinitario, Salamanca, 2008, p. 154

<sup>11</sup> La negrilla de la preposición “por”, por mi parte, obedece a que creo que hubiera sido mejor decir padecer con Cristo. Aspecto que queda mejor recogido cuando el documento afirma que el amor pastoral participa en el amor divino. Por eso, como consecuencia de esta afirmación hubiera sido mejor la expresión “padecer con Cristo”.

## Foreign Priests in The Netherlands

### Reversed Mission, Mutual Assistance and Internal Outsourcing

#### Introduction

During the past decades, quite a lot has been written about the decrease of the number of Dutch foreign missionaries working in the overseas missions. So far very little has been written about new or foreign (I use these terms as equivalents) missionaries working in the Netherlands. Yet this is a new phenomenon that is largely neglected in Dutch mission and religious studies, which are preoccupied with Muslim communities and their spiritual leaders.

It is well known that between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council missionary institutes in the Netherlands sent an overwhelming number of missionaries to the mission territories. In 1950, 1 out of 550 Dutch Catholics was working as a missionary overseas, and 1 out of 9 Catholic missionaries in the world was Dutch. But, since the beginning of the 21st century, mission has been reversed. Missionary institutes in the Netherlands no longer send young missionaries to the old mission territories, but receive foreign missionaries to work in the Dutch society, and their number has more than doubled over the past seven years, as Table 1 shows.

<b>TABLE 1</b>	2006	2013	2014
Priests	45	101	109
Brothers	10	19	18
active nuns	109	292	288
contempl. nuns	21	61	74
Total	185	473	489

(Database Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes)

In 2014, 83% of the total number of members of religious institutes (N=5538) was “foreign” defined as “born outside the Netherlands”. The database of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes does not distinguish between European and extra-European foreigners but it is estimated that two thirds of the foreigners are extra-European. The enormous growth over the past years can partly be explained by the fact that some provinces of Netherlands religious institutes merged with other European provinces which caused mobility within these provinces. About one fifth of the foreign missionaries are involved in the administration of their religious institutes. And again one fifth of the foreign missionaries belong to new religious institutes that were founded outside the Netherlands. These statistics are not complete because not all new religious institutes are members of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes, and their foreign missionaries are not included in the database. Within the Roman Catholic church this reversed mission started in the 1980s as part of the emerging new Catholic movements, and as a consequence of new policies within dioceses and religious institutes. In this article we focus on the latter group, making abstraction of the foreign priests within new Catholic movements and those incardinated within Dutch dioceses, looking at it from the perspectives of the Second Vatican Councils teaching on mutual missionary assistance of churches and of internal and external outsourcing in international businesses.

Seen from these two perspectives it is noticed that the reversed mission of foreign priests is controversial and contested, in mass media and policy statements. People ask themselves, what is the “assistance” that foreign priests bring, and in what way is it “mu-

tual”? And, assuming that outsourcing in international businesses is based on the economic principle of demand and supply, people ask, what is the demand, or whose demand is it? Foreign priests are compared with clerics within Muslim communities, brought from Turkey and Morocco, who are estranged from the Dutch situation, and need civic integration courses. The difference is that most foreign priests not only serve migrant Catholics but also Dutch Catholics.

The reversed mission of foreign priests is not only contested within the Dutch church and society, but also within the religious institutes themselves. A pamphlet entitled *Church and Ministry*, popular among progressive Catholics, distributed by the Provincial and Council of the Dutch Province of the Dominicans mentions among others “importing priests from abroad” as a strategy of the “Church authority” to meet the shortage of priests and to reduce the number of “Services of Word and Communion” in the parishes. It notes that “many church communities are, to say the least, unhappy with this situation”. Also other studies, conducted among others in Germany and the United States, show that there is an ambiguity or uneasiness in the relation between “old” and “new” churches. On the one hand Dutch Catholics understand that “reversed mission” is a consequence of a globalizing world and church; on the other hand they find it difficult to accept that their church and country are seen as a “mission territory”. There is an ambiguity and uneasiness on both sides. Some of the foreign priests came to the Netherlands to convert Dutch people, e.g. to bring back the gospel to those who had forgotten about the gospel. And they are well aware of the paradox that it often was Dutch missionaries who brought the gospel to them, e.g. to the “young Churches” in the southern hemisphere. Once they are here they discover that many Dutch people are no longer members of the church or know about the



gospel, but that they are deeply spiritual and do a lot of charity work. It goes without saying that the group of foreign missionaries is not homogeneous. They come from different religious institutions and different countries, and their views of church and mission vary accordingly.

The aim of this article is to explore the uneasiness in the relation between foreign priests and Dutch Catholics, including Dutch “old” missionaries, and what should and could be done about it. I limit myself to the perspectives of the “new” and “old” missionaries. I did not directly study the “reception” of foreign priests by Dutch Catholics, only indirectly through what the foreign priests themselves tell about their experiences of how they are received by Dutch Catholics, and through reports in the mass media.

This article is based on an analysis of fifteen group discussions with “old” and “new” missionaries (particularly those in leadership positions), individual interviews with five higher superiors of religious institutions that receive new missionaries or think about doing that, participation in seminars of the workgroup International Religious Institutes of the Conference of Netherlands Religious, and a review of policy documents of international religious institutes, particularly of the Society of the Divine Word (working in Nieuwegein, The Hague, Amsterdam and Schiedam), the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (working in Rotterdam), and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (working in Eindhoven and Rotterdam). These sources were analysed using open and selective coding. In harmony with the so-called “pastoral circle” this paper has three parts: description, evaluation and innovation.

The assumption underlying this article is that the reversed mission of foreign priests (and this applies to all missionary enterprises) can only be successful, in economic terms, if it is demand-driven, or if it has an added value. It translates the traditional model of mission as

“sending” and “receiving” (the communication model) into a “demand” and “supply” model (a market model) and sees mission as operating on a “market of spiritual goods”.

### **Description**

Since the establishment of the apostolate for the immigrants in 1975, it was thought that returning missionaries could cater for the needs of immigrants. However, these missionaries themselves were estranged from the Dutch situation, so they were not very instrumental in helping immigrants to find their way in the Netherlands, and quite often these missionaries just continued their “Latin American” or “African” missions, not in Latin America or Africa, but in the Netherlands. For this reason, among others, the Dutch bishops decided that immigrant communities should be integrated into the territorial parishes.

Also because of decreasing numbers of returning missionaries the idea developed that missionaries could no longer provide pastoral services to the immigrant communities, so leadership had to come from within the immigrant communities themselves. But, apart from some specific immigrant communities, such as the Vietnamese, priest vocations from the immigrant communities were very few. The reason for this seems quite simple. Most immigrants came here primarily for economic reasons; and becoming a priest is not very profitable, not material-wise and not in terms of self-esteem, at least not in the Netherlands (the income of priests in Germany is higher and therefore Germany seems a preferred destination for foreign priests).

Consequently, since the early 1990s a new current developed: the coming of foreign missionaries sent by the new provinces of missionary institutes, first working within the administration of their own institutes, but later also in multicultural neighbourhoods of the “big cities”. But, this bringing of priests from other continents has been contested and is considered controversial, both from the perspective of the sending church, and of the receiving church. One of the provincial superiors whom we interviewed said that his invitation to foreign missionaries to work in the Netherlands was contested by Dutch fellow-

priests within his own religious institute who argued that the young churches overseas themselves have a shortage of priests. According to the new missionaries whom we interviewed there is breakdown of communication and a mismatch between their own expectations and those of the old missionaries, and between them and the Dutch church. Hereafter we shall describe this mismatch in terms of dilemmas. We hasten to add that we cannot generalize. A huge variety exists among the new missionaries, and within the religious institutes they belong to. This contribution is exploratory in nature, and needs further research.

### **Presence versus Project**

From the 1970s onwards, religious institutes in the Netherlands developed an approach that could be described as “Christian presence” in harmony with the spirituality of Charles de Foucault. So, when these institutes invite foreign missionaries to the Netherlands they want them not “to do many things”, but simply “to be there”. The foreign missionaries, however, come from churches that are mainly project oriented. Coming from so-called developing countries, many of them see mission primarily in terms of offering social services to people in need.

### **Parish versus Mission**

In the Netherlands it has become common practice that members of religious institutes do not take responsibility for parishes. Many Dutch missionaries do not see it as their primary task to “fill the gaps” in parishes, but to perform extra-ordinary ministries in addition to parishes. In many cases they set up a parallel structure. Most foreign missionaries, however, are trained in their seminaries to be parish priests. They do not see a conflict between parish and mission, but tend to think in terms of missionary parishes, or pastoral mission.

### **Clergy versus Laity**

Some higher superiors of missionary institutes fear that bringing foreign priests would limit the role of the laity. They say that since the 1970s they have invested in lay missionaries and that these lay missionaries are the true heirs of the religious institutes. Bringing in

foreign priests would strengthen a clerical church and sacramental ministry again. Some of the foreign priests from their side say that they are used to catechists working in outstations. They come from huge parishes which lack priests and in which lay people always played a crucial role.

### **Sacraments versus Social Ministry**

Another mismatch is that the old missionaries say that the new missionaries are “too sacramental” or “too spiritual”. What the Dutch church needs is not sacraments, but social ministry. They think that if the church does not serve, it serves nothing. The foreign missionaries, however, do not make these distinctions. Coming from non-Western cultures, they tend to think in more holistic terms. They speak about “integral development”, in which material and spiritual development, development of body and soul, go together.

### **Foreign Missionaries and Dutch Missionaries**

Some religious superiors fear that bringing in foreign missionaries would reproduce religious institutes that are no longer “of this time”. The old religious institutes should die before new flowers could flourish in the Dutch religious landscape. Henceforth, foreign missionaries are welcome, but they should not be involved in the administration of “old” structures of religious institutes. The foreign missionaries themselves feel that they are not taken seriously, or even excluded from the administration of their institutes, and marginalized. Some of the foreign missionaries spoke in terms of a “tacit racism”, “paternalism” and “superiority complex” on the side of the old Dutch missionaries.

### **Secularization and Acculturation**

According to religious superiors it is almost impossible for foreign missionaries to get accustomed to secularization. Consequently they cannot take leadership positions in the Dutch parishes, or be responsible for the process of fusion of parishes. The Netherlands is one of the most secularized societies in the world, and quite unique in its church situation. The foreign missionaries on the other hand say that

they are used to non-Christian environments, coming from India or Indonesia, where Christians are a minority, or China, where religious expression was restricted until recently. And, according to them, when Dutch missionaries went to their mission territories, they also had to get accustomed to surroundings that were different from the ones they knew. The same applies to foreign missionaries coming to the Netherlands.

### **Evaluation**

According to the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, the responsibility for mission is entrusted to the local church. But as mission of the Catholic, or worldwide Church, mission has necessarily a universal dimension. For this reason the new churches should participate in the universal mission by sending missionaries to other parts of the world. Thus, the reversed mission of new missionaries coming from Africa, Asia and Latin America to the Netherlands is in harmony with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and with later concepts such as “mission in six continents” and “mutual missionary assistance of churches”.

Although the phrase “mission in six continents” was first expressed at the World Mission Conference of the World Council of Churches in Mexico 1963, the idea that Europe is a mission territory was advocated by Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel already in 1942.<sup>37</sup> One can also argue that the concept of “foreign mission” dates from the 17th century “internal mission” as practiced among others by the Congregation of the Mission, popularly known as Lazarists, among common people in France. So, the notion of “mission in Europe” is not new. In the Catholic Church the notion of “mutuality in mission” was developed during the Second Vatican Council after Catholic communities in former mission territories had been recognized as “local churches” in their own right, who should be self-supporting, self-ministering, and self-propagating.

### **Internationalization and Outsourcing**

To a certain extent the Second Vatican Council's view of church and mission was far-sighted. As the first manifestation of the World Church, the Second Vatican Council was in harmony with the internalization of international companies. It is not uncommon to compare human resources management in the Roman Catholic Church and in multinational corporations.

The "mutual missionary assistance of churches" paradigm has a parallel in international businesses, where outsourcing is quite normal. Outsourcing means contracting out a business activity to another business unit within the same enterprise (internal outsourcing), or to a third-party (external outsourcing), because they can do it better or cheaper. The term "outsourcing" became popular in the United States in the beginning of the 21st century and can involve transferring employees from one business unit to another.

Dutch companies invite information and communication technicians from India, hospital surgery assistants from South Africa, and nurses from Indonesia, to work in the Netherlands because businesses or hospitals lack qualified personnel. So when religious institutes bring foreign priests to do missionary work, it is not necessarily a "conservative" activity but can be very up-to-date. Transferring missionaries from one "province" of a religious institute to another can be seen as a form of internal outsourcing. It is simply a matter of human resources management on the basis of demand and supply.

### **Not a Carbon Copy of the Local Church**

But, what is the demand? Or better, whose demand is it? Do the foreign missionaries who belong to religious institutions have any added value to the local church or society? If they simply reduplicate what Dutch priests or foreign priests working within the dioceses or within new Catholic movements already do, they do not bring anything new. So, what is it that makes them different? Do they have an own voice? Moreover, do they have their own theology, and charisma?

On the supply side, the foreign missionaries themselves think that they do have an added

value. The members of the Society of the Divine Word, for example, consider themselves to be "followers of the Word". They are not primarily interested in "teaching dogmas" but in "telling stories". They bring an alternative to the legalistic church, and see their contribution in communicating Biblical narratives. Moreover, taking their inspiration from the prologue of the gospel of John, they perceive their mission as quite universal and inclusive. The missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit say that living together in an international community is an example to the Dutch church and society showing that a complex and pluralistic society needs not to be a "multicultural drama" or "multicultural illusion", as some policy makers and politicians tend to say; and that inter-cultural living is not easy, but very well possible!

### **Spirituality and Community Life**

Apart from being one of the most secularized countries in the world, the Netherlands is also one of the most de-institutionalized societies in the world. Coming from an era in which the Netherlands was extremely church-centred, divided into neatly separated "pillars" (Catholic, Protestant, socialist) in which life was collective, the Dutch nation has become highly individualized.

Coming mostly from non-Western societies which are perceived as more communitarian, new missionaries want to show in the Dutch context that community life in itself is valuable. Moreover, the new missionaries who have lived in the Netherlands for a longer time understand that most Dutch people are not secularists, atheists or even agnostics, but "spiritual seekers". So, members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit ("Spiritans") want to build spiritual centres where spiritual seekers can feel at home.

### **Clergy versus Laity**

According to the foreign missionaries themselves, inviting them is not necessarily an attack on laity. Some churches in the southern hemisphere maintained the post Second Vatican Council spirit with its theologies of liberation or dialogue, and small or basic Christian

communities. Many of the foreign missionaries are familiar with the outstation system in which catechists perform pastoral duties. According to them, they can bring back to the Netherlands what was brought by Dutch missionaries to the southern hemisphere, but lost here in the Netherlands since the early 1970s. Foreign missionaries turn the argument that inviting them signifies an attack on lay ministries the other way round. By not inviting foreign missionaries and not taking full responsibility of parishes, more parish communities will lack Eucharistic celebrations. One can predict that the processes of “joining parishes into a region, in which one Dutch priest has to be of service to more than one parish”,<sup>43</sup> and thus the process of the Dutch church becoming more clerical will go on. So bringing foreign missionaries can also safeguard lay ministries, if the new missionaries take full responsibility of parishes and continue to involve lay people just as they did in the outstations “at home”.

Moreover, international missionary institutes show that lay ministries are not a threat to the priesthood. Several of these institutes include lay missionaries as “associates”, “affiliates” or “friends” in their missionary work, and they advocate collaboration between them and the foreign priests.<sup>44</sup> This, however, is also true for some of the new movements in the Catholic Church, thus not unique for the international missionary institutes.

### **Sacraments versus Social Ministry**

In a welfare state, material needs are catered for by the government. Due to neo-liberal politics, the state's social services are minimized and churches fill the gaps. The tragedy is that Dutch priests think that immigrants and people at the underside of the society need social ministry, but increasingly these people go to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches because there, their spiritual needs are taken seriously.

### **Parish versus Presence**

According to the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* there is no conflict between parish and mission. It speaks about missionary parishes or pastoral mission. If parishes run by

missionaries would simply duplicate the existing parishes, indeed they would not add anything to traditional parish structures. But if they show alternatives, they really add their own voice to the plurality of voices in the church.

### **A Generation Gap**

The above-mentioned “breakdown of communication” or “mismatch” between “old” and “new” missionaries is not only a conflict between Western and non-Western people, but also between the older and the younger generation. The younger generation in the Netherlands, at least the church-going group, is more sacramental and charismatic than the 8th May Movement type of Catholics, who are more cerebral and ethical believers.<sup>47</sup> For the younger generation belief comes from the heart, not from the brains. And coping with ecclesiastical hierarchy seems less difficult for church-going youngsters than for the older generation in the Netherlands, who experienced the emancipation process in the 1960s.

### **Paternalism or Neo-Colonialism**

The fact that the new missionaries were excluded from the administration of their own religious institutions seems incomprehensible to them. In their self-understanding they came to the Netherlands to continue and enhance the spirituality of their religious institute, including its administration and management. The official reason for not involving foreign missionaries in the administration is that the “old” missionaries don't want to bother the new ones with structures “of the past”, as was shown above, but they also say that the new missionaries “are not yet ready” for this task because “they do not speak the Dutch language fluently”, or “the situation of the Dutch church is too complicated” for them. One can see a pattern of neo-colonialism or paternalism here.

### **Innovation**

It is widely acknowledged that coaching and education are keys to the success of “reversed mission”, but that the new missionaries are not well trained for their job. After restructuring theological education in the Netherlands in the 1960s, Dutch missionaries who went to mis-

sion territories overseas were relatively well prepared for their job, but this seems less the case with the new missionaries coming to the Netherlands.

### **Foreign Missionaries and New Movements**

As was mentioned above, apart from bishops inviting foreign priests to work in their dioceses, there are the “new movements” such as *chemin neuf*, neo-catechumenate, Emmanuel community, Sant Egidio community, *Comune e liberazione*, the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Theresa in India, the Argentine Servants of the Lord and Virgin of Matará, the Sisters of St. John and the Brothers of St. John, the Colombian *Misioneros de Cristo*, the Indian Heralds of the Good News, and so on, who work in the Netherlands.

Some of them do well in terms of numbers. The Emmanuel community attracts young people who seek meaning in life. The Sant Egidio community combines piety with social activism. In June 2014 it took over the Moses and Aaron Church in the City Centre of Amsterdam combining liturgical with diaconal activities. The *Servidoras del Señor y de la Virgen de Matará*, popularly known as “Blue Sisters”, form the female branch of the Argentina founded the Institute of the Divine Word. It became influential in the Netherlands after a Dutch woman became the superior general of this congregation. The ministries of the new Catholic movements are quite diverse and cannot be generalized. Some work for renewal, others for restoration of traditional parish structures. For the “old” missionary institutes working in the Netherlands there is no reason to condemn or criticize these “new” institutes, or even feel threatened by them. Contrary to the secularization thesis which claims that plurality leads to a loss of plausibility, rational choice theorists argue that plurality and competition do not decrease, but increase religious loyalties.

### **Protestants, Women and Lay People in the Church**

Without generalizing, it is relatively easy to identify some of the issues where the communication between foreign missionaries and

Dutch Catholics goes wrong, and this has to do with “typical Dutch” post Second Vatican Council processes in the Dutch Catholic Church, illustrated well by the development of the Dutch “New Catechism”. First of all, in a context where Roman Catholics used to be a peripheral group, dominated by Protestants, after the Second Vatican Council closed Catholic communities changed into open ones, fostering relations with the “outside world”. Ecumenical relations are high on the agenda of many parishes, and inter-communion is a widely accepted practice.

Moreover, due to rapid secularization and decrease of priestly vocations, Dutch parishes learned to give pastoral responsibilities to lay people, particularly to women, who seem to be more active in the churches than men. For some of the foreign missionaries this is a challenge to overcome. One of them narrated his culture shock when he was not invited to concelebrate Mass at his first Christmas Eve in the Netherlands. The Mass was dominated by lay people while he was sitting in the church. Foreign priests were used to women and lay people in general as “helpers of the priest”, in no way equal to them, and not responsible for financial administration or pastoral ministry.

### **Conduct Theological Studies in the Netherlands**

According to the mission decree, the formation of missionaries must be complemented in the countries to which they are sent so that they get acquainted with the history, social structures and customs of the peoples. Missionary institutes should collaborate as much as possible in order to co-ordinate their work both in the country of origins as well as the mission territories, and this applies also to the missionary formation. Specialized institutes of mission studies should concentrate on ethnology, linguistics, history, religious studies, sociology and pastoral theology. Some of the Dioceses prefer to accept foreign missionaries before their priestly ordination. For example, in the diocese of Roermond six Indian neophytes started in the diocesan seminary in the academic year 2013-2014. The German Province of the Society of the Divine Word does the same in its Higher Institute for Philosophy

and Theology at St Augustine. Advanced studies for foreign missionaries are needed. To the extent that basic Christian communities in the Netherlands exist, they are not grass-roots communities, but communities of highly learned lay people. So for the new missionaries it is important to be well educated and acquainted with the Dutch education system.

### **Making Parishes Missionary**

Instead of taking distance of parishes, or being involved without taking full responsibility for parishes and doing their “own things” next to them, it is desirable if foreign missionaries do take full responsibility of parishes, but do it in ways that make them different from diocesan priests, this is: making parishes missionary in the sense of boundary crossing, and making parishioners true missionaries in the sense of bridge builders between people with different cultural and religious orientations.

More or less forced by the demands of the “new” missionaries themselves, and by financial constraints, religious institutes in the Netherlands have started to take over responsibility for territorial parishes again. And some bishops allow them, and even want them, to combine traditional parish work with missionary tasks, on a fifty-fifty basis. There is a win-win situation here.

In contrast to the diocesan priests, who tend to focus on herding the “church-goers”, foreign missionaries should focus on the “lost sheep”, or “spiritual seekers”, without neglecting the former group. It would be desirable if international religious institutes would establish an “experimental garden” where foreign missionaries can develop necessary skills for missionary work in a Dutch context, guided by supervision, reflection and coaching.

### **Reversed Mission as Two-Way Process**

Reversed mission does not only require a change of mentality on the part of the foreign missionaries who are sent to the Netherlands, but also on the part of the Dutch faithful who receive them. For example, many Dutch Catholics interpret wearing of a clerical collar as a sign of conservatism. In the same way they interpret wearing a veil by Muslim women or Catholic nuns as signs of conservatism, be-

cause they are no longer used to them in Dutch society. They have to learn that there is not necessarily a link between the practice of wearing a clerical collar or a veil and the religious attitude of the person who wears them.

### **Conference of Religious in the Netherlands**

Since the early 1990s the Religious Superiors' Conferences of Priests, Sisters and Brothers merged to become the Conference of Netherlands Religious (Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen — KNR). Time has come to transform the Conference of Netherlands Religious to the Conference of Religious in the Netherlands, independent of their nationality, not only offering leadership positions to foreign missionaries of “old” missionary institutes, but also opening itself to “new” religious institutes that originate from outside the Netherlands. Nationality is a strange concept in the Catholic (this is universal, thus transnational) Church anyway.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The aim of this article was to explore the uneasiness in the relation between foreign priests and Dutch Catholics, including Dutch “old” missionaries, and what should and could be done about it. On the basis of an analysis of our sources we conclude that there is an uneasiness on the side of the new missionaries because they feel not welcomed by Dutch Catholics, and not taken seriously by the “old” Dutch missionaries. The “old” missionaries feel uneasy because on the one hand they share the doubts of the other Dutch Catholics, including their own fellow missionaries, and on the other hand, they share the ideals of their general superiors and local bishops. Answering the question what should and could be done about the uneasiness we conclude that the reversed mission of foreign priests is in harmony with the internationalization processes in the Catholic Church and in international businesses. From the perspective of the Second Vatican Council it is important to improve open-ended communication, by good preparation on the side of the foreign priests, and awareness building on the side of Dutch Catholics. From the perspective of internal out-

sourcing it is important to close the gap between supply and demand. Even if there is no “market” for foreign priests, there are indications that they are developing a market, by creating demands. In some cases Dutch parishioners preferred a foreign priest above a Dutch priest, saying that the former make time for them, and listen to them, even if their ability to communicate in Dutch is not yet perfect. There is also an uneasiness because the reversed mission of foreign priests requires a change of perspective. As one of them said, “we did not come to demolish the church but to build it up”. Interestingly, in inviting foreign missionaries, none of the international religious institutes focus on what usually is seen as the “core business” of these institutes, the *missio ad gentes*, or primary evangelization. Seemingly dialogue with secular society is yet a bridge too far for them.

**Ref:** *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 45 No.1 (2016), pp. 66-85.



## Developing Good Church Leadership Habits

Leadership requires consistent sharpening to overcome bad habits, sometimes fatal, that leaders develop. I will interact with Hans Finzel's book *The Top Ten Mistakes That Leaders Make*: Victor Books, 1994. Since 1994 he has spoken with leaders from many different walks of life - policemen, teachers, school administrators, corporate leaders, middle management, government agency employees, businessmen, salespeople, family business owners, and the elders and staff of local churches. When he is asked, "Have you changed your mind about the top ten mistakes?", he answers: "Absolutely not!" (72-76). The current edition has received many accolades. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* observes, "Most leadership books have a short shelf life, but Hans' book has endured the test of time. It's a great read on servant leadership." John C. Maxwell, author of numerous leadership works, speaker, and founder of The *Enjoy Group* notes, "This is one of the most practical books on leadership I have in my own personal library. If you are serious about becoming a better leader, you will want to read this book." Joseph M. Stowed, author, speaker, and former president of Moody Bible Institute, remarks: "Hans' book is a leader's mirror... you'll see yourself in previously unrevealed ways and learn what it takes to get presentable for effective leadership" (1-3).

This paper highlights the ten bad habits that Finzel insists church leaders must avoid to end "the great leadership famine", offering them as suggestions for African leaders to consider.

### What are these bad habits and are they prevalent in the African Church – Yes or No?

The top-down attitude	Yes
Putting paper-work before people-work	Yes
Absence of affirmation	Yes
No room for mavericks	Yes
Dictatorship in decision-making	Yes
Dirty delegation	Yes
Communication chaos	Yes
Missing the clues of corporate culture	Yes
Success without successors	Yes
Failure to focus on the future	Yes

#### 1. Get rid of the top-down attitude and embrace servant leadership.

As Finzel comments: "Of all the sins of poor leadership, none is greater and none is still committed more often, generation after generation" (163-164). Where does this leadership mistake show up in the Church? It may be seen in: "(1) abusive authority, (2) deplorable delegation, (3) lack of listening (4) dictatorship in decision making, (5) lack of letting go, and (6) in egocentric manners" (174-175). While our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrates servant leadership to the Church, it is rare today, and unfortunately the top-down leadership attitude seems to come naturally to most leaders. Finzel reviews new leadership styles that oppose the top-down, autocratic style: "participatory management", "the flat organizational style", or the "democratic leadership". He concludes that "servant leadership embraces all" these models (193-194).

Emmanuel Wafula studied *Philippians 2: 3-11* and drew out seven servant leadership principles:

Christ's attitude of humility and sacrificial love for other people is foundational in understanding and practice of servant leadership.

Attitude influences our thought patterns and the way we view people and tasks as servant leaders.

Biblical servant leaders' primary concern is the value and dignity of others and they perceive the individual's self-worth as of greater importance than their needs.

Humility does not erode the personality of an individual. It shows the power and strength of the leader employed for the wellbeing of others.

Biblical servant leaders believe in followers however frail they might be and they help their followers to achieve self-actualization.

Biblical servant leaders exercise preferential treatment of others regardless of their social status.

Both pain and praise are intertwined in biblical servant leadership. A leader accepts the one in the place of the other.

How then can today's church leaders practice servant leadership, leading without the arrogance of a top-down attitude? Or, as Finzel enquires: "If my desire is to be a servant leader as I maintain my responsibilities of authority in the organization, what are my guiding principles?" He offers six alternative practices (271-279):

Not abusive authority,  
but servitude  
(John 13).

Not deplorable delegation,  
but freedom for people to  
be themselves (Eph. 4).

Not lack of listening, but focus on the needs  
of others (Phil. 2).

Not dictatorship, but partners in the process  
(1 Peter 5:1-4).

Not holding on, but letting go with  
affirmation  
(1 Thess. 5:11-14).

Not egocentrism, but power for others  
(Col. 3:12,13).

## **2. Do not put paper-work before people-work.**

Not long ago one could have argued with Finzel about this being a major mistake in Africa, but probably not today. Due to the interaction in the global community, paper-pushers are finding a foothold in the urbanizing Africa, and they make statements like: (1) "People bother me; they are interruptions." (2) "I prefer to be alone ... to get my work done." (3) "This job would be great... except for the people!" (4) "I'm out of touch with the networks and currents in the workplace." (5) "I'm insensitive; I tend to run over people." (6) "I listen poorly ... if at all." (7) "I'm impatient." (8) "My self-worth is based on accomplishment" (313-315).

Finzel read the Gospels, underlined all the leadership principles, and made an amazing discovery: "Jesus spent more time touching people and talking to them than doing any other action. His focus was not on words, it was on compassion" (389-391). The greater one's leadership role, the more important people work is. How can a pastor put aside the paperwork? Finzel's suggests that church leaders should "Love your wastebasket" (442-444). But what does this mean? It requires discarding old ways of doing things and finding ways to spend time with one's co-workers, spouse, children, and friends. This might include taking lunches away from work with others, praying for people, exercising with colleagues, changing locations to get out among people, delegating more, "ransacking" instead of reading everything, seeing people as priority one, and Managing by Wandering Around (MbWA). Finzel also recommends listening. "Listen is the most important word in a leader's language. Just because we are the leaders does not mean we are the only ones with a voice" (548-554). Finzel insists: "The L in leader stands for listening (James 1:19).

In addition to these are four other activities:

1. Empathizing. If others are happy, share their joy. If there is deep tragedy in their lives, stop everything and weep with them (Rom. 12:15).

2. Comforting. We have gone through so much ourselves and those experiences give us

the richness as leaders to be able to comfort others when they go through the same pain (see 2 Cor. 1:3-4).

3. Carrying burdens. This is the way we “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

4. Encouraging. Let people know often they are doing a good job. Look for the good and point it out, and you'll see more and more good come from your colleagues. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11) (549-550).

### **3. Affirm and praise people when they need it.**

Absence of affirmation is a third bad habit to avoid. People thrive on affirmation and praise. As Finzel claims, “We wildly underestimate the power of the tiniest personal touch of kindness.” So we must “Learn to read the varying levels of affirmation your people need” (471-472). Finzel observes that “Christian organizations are sometimes the worst, because there is the attitude that “they are working for God, and he will reward them for their labors.” Some even argue that it builds egos to give men praise, therefore, it is unspiritual and is to be avoided at all costs” (483-484). Leaders must learn the varying levels of affirmation their people need. Finzel recognizes these people as: Desperados ...can't get enough praise and good strokes. They are desperate for approbation. Up-and-downers ...go along just fine with little need of attention. But then she will enter into an emotional valley. “Normal” people ...come from stable homes and may not need as much affirmation as others. Autopilots ...the few people who really do not need any encouragement; “all we need to do is cultivate kindness.” (509-533)

As Paul told the Thessalonians, “...we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (1Thess. 5:14). Poor leaders demand a great deal from people and never give them a pat on the back for a job well done. Effective leaders realize that most people are motivated more by affirmation and encouragement (562-563). Paul White refers to several key components for employees to

think and feel they are appreciated. These include:

1. Effective recognition and appreciation must be individualized and delivered personally.

2. Appreciation needs to be communicated using the recipients' preferred appreciation language.

3. A challenge to effective appreciation is we tend to communicate to others in ways that are most meaningful to us.

4. Acts of appreciation need to be viewed as valuable by the recipient.

5. For appreciation to be effective and believable, it must be communicated regularly.

6. Appreciation needs to be communicated in a way that is perceived as authentic by the recipient.

### **4. Allow room for mavericks.**

A maverick is an independent individual with a pioneer spirit. Webster's Dictionary defines a “maverick” as, “an independent individual who does not go along with a group.” Webster's synonyms for maverick include “dissident,” “dissenting,” “heretical,” and “nonconformist”. Jesus was a maverick and was eventually destroyed by the institutional religious body he came to redeem (641-642). “Mavericks are free spirits that have always been misunderstood. This is as true in the Church as it is in the business world.” (584-586). But not all troublemakers and malcontents are true mavericks. As Finzel observes:

Some are just a pain to have around and don't do anyone much good. So it is important to learn to recognize and reward properly the mavericks in our midst. Legitimate mavericks who can bring you into the future: care not just for their own ideas but for the goals of the organization; are making a difference in their present position; are willing to earn the right to be heard; are influencing others and producing good results.

How can the Church encourage the true mavericks who can help it? Finzel suggests: (1) give them a long tether - they need space to soar, (2) put them in charge of something they can really own, (3) listen to their ideas

and give them time to grow, (4) let them work on their own if they wish, (5) leave them alone and give them time to blossom (694-697).

He further observes, “Mavericks can save from the slide toward institutionalism. They bring the future. Over time our manmade organizations grow old, rigid and tired, just like we humans do. The pioneering spirit of mavericks can stop that slide and turn it around.” Unfortunately, “Large organizations usually kill off mavericks before they can take root. The larger and older an organization gets, the more it tends to reject creative types. We have to learn how to cultivate pioneers among us.” Mavericks are misunderstood because “they make messes by their very nature”, but these are “the good messes institutions need” because “institutions become too organized for their own good, and thus have a hard time accepting the disruption that change agents bring.” These messes are especially needed to give “a rebirth at middle age”. Nevertheless, it is important to discover the truly useful mavericks since some people simply love to complain. Finzel recognizes that the useful mavericks “do not just cause trouble, but rather truly want to make a difference”. Thus “we need to create space in our organizations for these beneficial mavericks to flourish” (707-709).

### **5. Get rid of dictatorship in decision-making**

As Finzel observes, “Dictators take the fun out of life and break the human spirit that longs to soar with achievement.” How do dictators operate? They are easily recognized because:

1. They hoard decisions.
2. They view truth and wisdom as primarily their domain.
3. They restrict decisions to an elite group.
4. They surprise their workers with edicts from above. (878)

Another label for the dictatorial style of leadership is what Finzel calls the “apostolic” view of decision making in the Church. These leaders claim to have special knowledge or anointing that gives them the inside edge on truth: “I know the answers, because I have been given special insight, knowledge, and

position. Therefore, I will determine our direction, for I am the leader and I know best” (719).

However, as S. Gumbe of the University of Zimbabwe observes, “Today, leadership is increasingly associated not with command and control but with the concept of inspiration, of getting along with other people and creating a mission with which others can identify.” So, how can the Church overcome dictatorial leadership? Finzel notes moving beyond the “I know all the answers” attitude is required. The alternative to dictatorial decision-making is team leadership. Webster's Dictionary defines “team” as “a number of persons associated together in work or activity”. Finzel contends that,

Moving to teams has liberated management and harnessed the power of more and more creative energy at every level. Leadership is teamwork, coaching, creativity-and the synergy of a group of people inspired by their leader. The apostolic style stands at the opposite end of the continuum from the leader who sees his primary role as managing the resources of a team. The apostle sees truth as having come down from on high. The apostle knows the battle plan and where the team will go. It is the team's responsibility to implement the dreams and visions that were singularly presented to the leader (836-841).

Finzel advocates “flat” organizational structures for the Church because these are the model of the future. He concludes:

Though there are many ways to draw organizational charts, people today prefer to work in flat organizations without huge bureaucracies over their heads. Young workers especially prefer a shorter distance between the front lines and the CEO. Top down pyramids are a thing of the past! (891-893).

Leaders of flat organizational structures may be referred to as facilitators. How do facilitators lead? They are readily recognized because:

1. They delegate decisions.
2. They involve others as much as possible.
3. They view truth and wisdom as being distributed throughout the organization.
4. They are developers.
5. They see people as their greatest

resources for ideas that will bring success.

6. They give their people space to make decisions.
7. They let those who are responsible decide how jobs will be done. When the best leader's work is done, the people will say, "We did it ourselves!" (879-882).

Today's church leaders must work together with their teams in order to draw out ideas and organize them. "Unless there is goal ownership, there will never be strong support for the leader. The leader will ultimately have to steer the group into fulfilling the mission, but what that mission is should be determined together by the key players of the team"(825-882). Nevertheless, it is important to heed some words of caution from Gumbe:

Effective leaders do not use one leadership style in isolation of other styles. Leaders adjust their styles to the operative situation ... national culture is certainly an important situational variable in determining which leadership style is the most effective. National culture of subordinates can affect leadership style. A leader cannot choose his/her style at will. What is feasible depends on the cultural conditioning of a leader's subordinates.

In addition, Gumbe provides several significant examples that church leaders may consider:

... a manipulative, autocratic or directive style is compatible with high power distance. Power distance rankings should also be good indicators of employee willingness to accept participative leadership. Participation is likely to be most effective in lower power distance culture. An achievement-oriented style that is focused on setting challenging goals and expects employees to perform at their highest levels, is likely to be most effective in cultures where uncertainty avoidance is low.

## **6. Develop clean delegation habits.**

A sixth bad habit, dirty delegation, involves refusing to relax and let go. Finzel categorizes this as "over-managing", and labels it as "one of the great cardinal sins of poor leadership". He remarks that, "Nothing frustrates those

who work for you more than sloppy delegation with too many strings attached." But there are numerous reasons why delegation is hard to do well. These include: (1) fear of losing authority, (2) fear of work being done poorly, (3) fear of work being done better, (4) unwillingness to take the necessary time, (5) fear of depending on others, (6) lack of leadership training and positive delegation experience, (7) fear of losing value in the organization (912-935).

Jesus delegated to his disciples the fulfillment of the Great Commission-spreading the word about God's love. He prepared them well and then turned them loose. However, delegation must match each worker's follow-through ability. Jesus not only gave them an important job to do, He promised to follow up on that delegation with his presence: "...surely I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20). He was going to hold his followers accountable, but he also intended to encourage them along the way. This is an excellent practice of delegation (893-895). Finzel's five key ingredients for clean delegation are:

1. Have faith in the one to whom you delegate.
2. Release the desire to do it "better" yourself.
3. Relax from the obsession that it has to be done your way.
4. Practice patience in the desire to do it faster yourself.
5. Vision to develop others by delegating (1044-1046).

Besides these key ingredients, Finzel provides nine guidelines for clean delegation:

1. Choose qualified people.
2. Exhibit confidence.
3. Make their duties clear.
4. Delegate the proper authority.
5. Do not tell them how to do the work.
6. Set up accountability points along the way.
7. Supervise according to their follow-through style.
8. Give them room to fail occasionally.
9. Give praise and credit for work well done (1046-1048).

## 7. Cure communication chaos.

A seventh bad habit church leaders must avoid is communication chaos. Leaders should never assume that anyone knows anything. In fact, the bigger the group, the more attention must be given to communication. It is important to remember that when left in the dark, people tend to dream up wild rumors. Therefore, communication must be the passionate obsession of effective church leadership (1058-1060). Finzel has observed that as organizations grow from small entrepreneurs into professionally managed organizations, communication must be given more attention and must become more formal (1086-1087).

Finzel outlines a communication pattern from birth, through adolescence, to maturity:

Oral	to	Written
Informal	to	Formal
Spontaneous	to	Planned
Active	to	Passive
Lively	to	Liturgical

As organizations grow, the original group of founders can become an inside elite. Since they were there from the beginning, they have the most information and power (1098-1099). Thus, it becomes important for church leaders to put the strategic plan in writing, so all can sign off on it and then use that body of knowledge to orient each new member of the leadership group (1117-1118). The higher one goes in leadership, the more sensitive one must be about everything communicated. This is what Finzel refers to as becoming aware of "communication linkages." Every time a phone call is made or a letter is written or a decision is made, the leader needs to ask: "What people are affected by this decision/letter/memo/directive? What are the linkages?" Finzel admonishes leaders to "Think of all the people who need to be informed when a decision is made" (1123-1126). What are some of the reasons why it is hard for leaders to communicate to everyone in the organization? Finzel comment that leaders fail to inform and listen to others because they have: too little time too many people to supervise,

too much pressure, too much physical distance between leaders and followers, too much knowledge to patiently listen to followers who discover things the leaders already know, too much pride I listen to others, and communication overload (1155-1166).

How does one know if the organization has communication chaos? Finzel guides the church leader to ask how many of the following symptoms are present in their organization: (1) chaos and confusion about the group's direction, (2) arguments or disagreements about priorities, (3) duplication effort, (4) waste of resources through jobs that get canceled midstream, (5) conflicts among departments, (6) poor morale, (7) poor productivity, (8) idleness of resource, (9) job insecurity (1229-1231).

How can church leaders overcome chaos? Finzel offers a number of good suggestions:

1. Have regular press conferences with your people. Let them hear your heart. Allow them to ask you tough questions.
2. Keep memos brief. Include one-page summaries on the top of lengthy reports. Use faxes and e-mail to keep communication fresh and up to the minute.
3. Produce a concise written statement of vision and objectives that can be distributed throughout your organization.
4. Have stand-up meetings to avoid lengthy discussions.
5. Read *Death by Meeting* by Patrick Lencioni to learn how to do meetings right.
6. Develop an in-house newsletter for weekly communication to the insiders.
7. As the leader, cast the vision to insiders as much as you do to outsiders.
8. Have face time with your leaders.
9. Play and pray with those you lead.
10. Schedule regular off-site meetings for team development that include play as well as work.
11. Make internal communications a top priority of your job.
12. Keep your followers informed as to what you expect of them.
13. Find ways to articulate and communicate vision and values.
14. Make sure that formal communication systems are in place.

15. Avoid the great surprise. Don't ambush people who are not doing their jobs well. Be honest.
16. MbWA: Manage by Wandering Around. Get out of your office, but be sensitive to others achieving their goals/don't interrupt another's work flow.
17. Find ways to tap into the underground within your organization. Have informants.
18. Practice HOT communication: Honest, Open, and Transparent. Nothing happens until people talk (1232-1252).

**8. Understand, cultivate and improve an organization's corporate culture.**

Missing the clues of corporate culture is an eighth bad habit for church leaders to avoid. An organization's corporate culture is the way insiders behave based on the values and group traditions that they hold. This should be a top leadership priority. Expressed simply it is "the way we do things around here". Leaders should never underestimate the mighty power of their organization's culture. With this in mind Finzel declares, "cultivating and changing the culture should be one of leadership's top priorities." However, leaders must respect values different from their own (1266-1267). Webster's Dictionary defines "culture" as:

The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations; the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time <popular culture> <southern culture>; the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.

Finzel defines culture simply as the unique customs, values, and artifacts of people (1317-1319) and shows that strong cultures contribute to organizational success when the culture supports the mission, goals, and strategy of the organization. He affirms:

The pursuit of excellence is certainly something that anyone involved in leading a Chris-

tian organization ought to be about. The Bible compels us to do whatever we do to the glory of God: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:3 1). "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). Later, Paul states, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (vv. 23-24). (1324-1329).

It is helpful to distinguish "values" from "beliefs". Finzel offers several samples of how values (preferences) and beliefs (moral absolutes) differ:

Preferences	Moral Absolutes
Tastes	Black/White
Regional/Cultural	Ethical Issues
Methodology/Not Theology	Right and Wrong Matters

(1344)

Finzel admonishes: "As a leader, spend some time alone and really think about your own values and beliefs. Then work with your leadership team and list the values and beliefs your whole team believes in. This list will become the unmitigated glue that holds your team together like layers in a sheet of plywood" (1362-1363). As Finzel observes: "Successful leaders learn how to harness the culture of their group for the common good."

He warns:

Never underestimate the mighty power of your organization's culture. It is impossible to initiate change in an organization without first understanding its culture. Cultivating and changing culture should be one of leadership's top priorities. Changing the culture in an organization takes a Herculean effort over many years, but it can be done. It is through those efforts that real lasting change takes root. Learn to respect values different from your own. Values are relative, beliefs are absolute.

Learning the difference is an essential task for leaders as they learn to sift through their corporate culture. Sometimes we must learn to give up on the smaller issues so we can affect the larger ones. (1482-1486).

### **9. Plan for successors as well as for success.**

The ninth mistake to avoid is success without successors. Would be successful Christian leaders end up being failures when they fail to prepare the way for their successors. Finzel reveals a number of barriers to grooming a successor: (1) lack of intrinsic job security or the need for job security, (2) insecurity about what to do next, (3) fear of retirement, (4) resistance to change, (5) comfort inflated/job-associated self-worth or inferior self-esteem, (6) the work role is your whole life, (7) lack of confidence, (8) thinking no one else can do the job like you do, (9) love for the job, (10) loving your leadership role, (11) potential loss of further investment, pension, (12) ceasing the human investment and not wanting to let it go or simply, (13) fear (1571-1573).

Good leaders recognize that preparing potential successors requires mentoring. But, what makes a good mentor? Finzel recognizes six common characteristics:

1. The ability to readily see potential in a person
2. Tolerance of mistakes, brashness, abrasiveness, and the like in order to see that potential develop
3. Flexibility in responding to people
4. Patience: knowing that time and experience are needed for development
5. Perspective: having the vision and ability to see down the road and to suggest the next steps a mentee needs to take
6. Gifts and abilities that build up and encourage others.

How do mentors go about their job of mentoring? Finzel's investigation has uncovered several important specifics. Mentors give: (1) timely advice, (2) letters, articles, books, or other literature to offer perspective, (3) finances, (4) freedom to emerge as a leader

even beyond the level of the mentor, (5) mentors risk their own reputations in order to sponsor a mentee, (6) mentors model various aspects of leadership functions to challenge mentees to move toward them, (7) mentors direct mentees to needed resources that will further develop them, (8) mentors co-minister with mentees in order to increase their confidence, status, and credibility (1628-1634).

### **10. Focus on the future.**

The final bad habit for church leaders to avoid is the failure to focus on the future. Finzel observes, "The future is rushing rapidly at us. A leader's concentration must not be on the past nor on the present, but on the future." Therefore, "Leadership must always be devoting itself to the issue of goals and strategies." As Finzel points out the emerging generations "have lost confidence in the hierarchical processes of government, church, education, and business." Today's "younger people are just not interested in investing their lives in the maintenance of fostering of our old institutional structures. They want to go where the action is, they want to make a difference, they want to work in new flat organizations, and they want to be in control of their destinies." Finzel's research reveals that, "The new generations insist on participation in a networking relationship throughout their organization. They prefer a highly decentralized, grassroots approach to problem solving" (1754-1757).

One of the primary responsibilities of leadership is creating vision and direction for the future. Successful leaders plan for the future. They direct or head the team in developing organizational goals, plans, and strategies that flow out of a crisp purpose or vision statement. (1842-1844). So, why do church leaders fail to focus on the future? Part of the answer lies in their inability to accept change. However, as Finzel points out that, "Change is inevitable; to not change is a sure sign of imminent extinction." Thus, "Leaders who don't change with the changing climate of our future world will, like dinosaurs, find themselves only a museum attraction." Unfortunately, as Finzel observes, "By nature we resist change. Most of us find it hard to see new trends de-

veloping in our chosen fields. People are quick to criticize innovations, because the changes frighten them.” (1766-1769). A second reason leaders may fail to focus on the future lies in trying to survive the tyranny of the urgent. This fights against planning and thinking time, and when leaders fail to make the time to plan for the future, they become its victims. They develop a style of reactionary leadership instead of the proactive leadership that anticipates the future (1791-1792). Proactive leaders devote themselves to goals and strategies. They ask, “Where are we going next, and why are we going there?” (1801). A third reason leaders fail to focus on the future involves the level of their ability to learn, unlearn, and re-learn. Finzel has observed two ways to approach the future, either as “learners” or as “closed experts”. The opposite of the learner is the “know-it-all”, whose type of management has the attitude of having mastered the trade. For this leader, “The old way is not only the best way, but really the only way.” Finzel calls this the “pro attitude” wherewith leaders convey: “We’re the pros at this; others can look to us and see how it ought to be done.” Christian organizations have added to this a “paralysis of hiding behind their spiritual views — theologizing their methodology”. Finzel chides, “The years of organizational tradition become a sacred cow that cannot and should not be tampered with. After all, it was created by our spiritual forefathers, who were led by God to create the organization we now inherit” (1815-1822).

Finzel insists that today's leaders must study the future and become “futurists” in their particular discipline. He advocates, “The future is the focus of an effective leader.” In fact, Finzel asserts, “To neglect the future is the biggest mistake a leader can make. Above mentioning, communicating, and paying attention to people, a leader must obsess about the future.” Vision is essential to every effective church leader. Finzel insists that, “Businesses and churches need these kinds of dreamers to stay relevant in a changing world.” He urges the church to not only “recruit dreamers” but also to spend time as leaders dreaming about what could be (1890-1894).

## Conclusion

This paper does not conclude with remarks by Hans Finzel nor with much personal comment from this writer. African leaders can evaluate Finzel's “Ten Mistakes” for themselves. Rather it offers words of wisdom from Henry and Richard Blackaby's book, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*:

Modern history is once again calling upon men and women to rise up and fulfill their God-given destiny to impact their world. True spiritual leaders do not wring their hands and wistfully recount the better times of days gone by. Genuine leaders understand they have but one life to live and so they expend it with purpose and passion. God placed you on the earth at this particular crossroad in history. You live in a time of great challenges but enormous opportunity. May you live, and lead, well.

**Ref:** *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Vol.32.1.2013, pp. 47-59.

## Un piccolo seme di dialogo

*Raffaele Luise*

“Il dialogo ecumenico e il dialogo interreligioso sono un cammino che si fa insieme tra la gente: cristiana, musulmana, ebrea, induista, buddhista, bahai e di ogni altra etnia o religione. Un cammino che alimenta e insieme sopravanza i rigidi tracciati delle pur necessarie discussioni tra i teologi».

L’Anno Santo della Misericordia si chiude, ma ci lascia, con queste parole di papa Francesco, straordinarie indicazioni di percorso, per costruire una società cosmopolita e pacifica: la visita a Lesbo tra gli immigrati di Francesco assieme a Bartolomeo I e a Hieronymos, l’incontro, il primo dopo mille anni, a Cuba tra Francesco e Kirill, il viaggio “luterano” del papa a Lund, la visita di Francesco nel tempio valdese a Torino, le visite di Bergoglio nelle moschee di Istanbul e a Bangui nel giorno d’apertura dell’Anno giubilare. Una potente tessitura di dialoghi che, lungi dallo svendere l’identità cristiana e cattolica, la fanno invece fiorire, perché – ci ricorda papa Francesco – la nostra è religione della Parola, e dunque ha inciso in sé stessa come elemento costitutivo questo dinamismo di dialogo.

Ora, l’Anno Santo si conclude, e proprio sul suo limitare, ci consegna un altro piccolo ma prezioso segno: la “camminata” interreligiosa di un popolo multicolore di trecento persone, tra religiosi e laici: cattolici, musulmani, bahai, buddhisti, induisti, provenienti da Giappone, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turchia, Stati Uniti, Algeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Malta, Polonia, Croazia, Belgio, Inghilterra e Italia, che la sera di venerdì 18 novembre si è snodata da Castel Sant’Angelo lungo via della Conciliazione, fino alla tomba di Giovanni Paolo II. Ed stato davvero emozionante vedere tanti musulmani,

ragazzi e ragazze con l’hijab, bahai, buddhisti e induisti, fusi in un gruppo compatto con i cattolici, pregare insieme con le parole delle diverse tradizioni culturali e religiose lo stesso Dio della pace, ed onorare insieme il papa della profezia di Assisi. E intonare con una sola voce, alla fine, davanti alla tomba di Wojtyla l’invocazione ebraica “Hevenu shalom aleichem”, mentre venivano consegnati 12 lumi ai diversi rappresentanti religiosi.

Nelle diverse “stazioni” della processione, lungo la via della Conciliazione e in piazza San Pietro, con il salmodiare del canto cristiano “Misericordes sicut Pater” si sono intrecciate le parole di Ghandi e quelle recenti pronunciate dal leader musulmano libanese Mohammad Sammak nell’Incontro interreligioso di ottobre ad Assisi con papa Francesco: “Compito dei musulmani è oggi quello di difendere e purificare la nostra fede dalle criminali strumentalizzazioni jihadiste”.

Un segno piccolo ma straordinario questa processione interreligiosa, organizzata dal padre Peter Baekelmans del Sedos, da Religions for Peace Italia e dalle Unioni dei Superiori maggiori, maschili e femminili, degli Ordini religiosi, e alla quale hanno partecipato anche alcuni membri del Cenacolo di amici di papa Francesco, soprattutto perché nata dal basso e tra le diverse genti religiose, che sono poi le condizioni imprescindibili perché il dialogo cresca e metta radici tra una umanità che sembra impennarsi sull’orlo dell’abisso.

<http://www.eancheilpaparema.it/2016/11/un-piccolo-seme-di-dialogo/>

***The English translation of this article can be found in the SEDOS website:***

*Dear Holy Father,*

*We wish to express our gratitude to you for having called the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, whose focus was not only on the Catholic Church, but on all Christianity and all religions and on every good human project based on Mercy. Mercy is the Door to enter the “construction site” that is always open to reconciliation and to inner peace, in the family, in the community, among religions and peoples.*

*Today, as followers of different religious traditions we have come to pass through the Holy Door of St Peter’s to express with our various prayers our concerted effort to become instruments of Peace in a world weakened by tragic naiveté, materialistic individualism, and self-destruction.*

*We feel your allies in taking care of the suffering of our fellow human beings on the entire planet by encouraging people and witnessing to hope.*

*For this, at the end of the Holy Year of Mercy, we have come together to pray and to ask forgiveness for our sins towards other religions, and forgiveness for the shortcomings of our religious neighbours.*



**Merry Christmas  
And  
Happy New Year  
2017!**