

# Bulletin 2017

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SEDOS

5000  
**Reformation**  
 Five Hundred Years 1517-2017

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## **SEDOS BULLETIN 2017**

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## *Editorial*

### **Dear Readers,**

The Catholic Church joins our Protestant brothers and sisters in their celebration of the 500 years of the Reformation. SEDOS too, is organizing an Ecumenical Celebration with the Lutheran Church “Christuskirche” in Rome, at the end of next month. This shows how far we are away from the birth pangs of the Reformation. We are now thankful for their contribution and are moving “from conflict to communion”. This is made clear by Reverend Jens-Martin Kruse in his article *Luther, Pope Francis and Ecumenism*. He clarifies some misconceptions about Luther’s reformation efforts, such as the correct understanding of the justification by God by “faith alone”. The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church at the end of last century has been an important step in this ecumenical dialogue where the role of works in relation to Grace is clarified.

This path of ecumenism that we have walked together through history, especially since the Second Vatican Council is made clear by Father Jacob Kavunkal in his article: *The Ministry of Jesus in the Light of the Reformation and Vatican II*. We have indeed learned our lesson from the reformation movement: the importance of the Bible, common priesthood through Baptism, and the vocation of the laity within the mission of the Church. These themes were taken up by Vatican II and are still being developed today, also in our missionary commitments. However, the 500 years of the Reformation is also a history of divisions within their own group. There are more than 40.000 denominations that refer



to the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, starting with Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancton, and others, and independence from papal authority by the Anglican Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Other more radical movements (Anabaptists, Moravianism) arose in Europe later. After this first wave of reformation, there were many other dissident movements but also efforts at reunion were seen, until the Pentecostal boom of last century. The Pentecostal Movement counted 540 million followers in the year 2000 and it is the largest family of Protestants in the world. We therefore have selected one example from the African continent of these movements of Pentecostal inspiration. Father Damien Etshindo describes in his article *Emergence of the “Revival Churches” in the Congo, Kinshasa*, the many challenges these Pentecostal churches pose to the life and work of the Catholic Church.

One of the positive influences of Ecumenism on the Catholic Church is for sure the community of Taizé. That is why we present as a DOCUMENT the talk of Brother Alois, Prior of Taizé, given at the Congress of Benedictine Abbots and Priors in Rome last year. The way they live monastic life today is by being a communion enlightened by the Word of God, and by being open to all Christians, Protestants and Catholics alike.

As NEWS TODAY we offer an article I wrote with a friend, Father Christian Tauchner, SVD, about the movie *Silence*. It poses the problem of “How do we do mission?”. A document entitled *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, released in 2011 by a broad coalition of Evangelicals, the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, agrees that Christian missionaries should renounce all “deception and coercive means” to win converts.

Jens-Martin Kruse

## Luther, Pope Francis and Ecumenism

*Martin Luther entered the Monastic Augustinian Order in 1506 and was ordained a priest on 4 April 1507. (Pope Leo X had consolidated the Augustinian Order in order to complement the Franciscans and Benedictines).*

Half a millennium lies between Luther and us. The world into which Martin Luther was born on 10 November 1483 is just as strange to us today as to the people of his time with its fears, provocative questions and the answers that Luther found. Two other difficult factors come to mind. First, Luther is regarded, as far as the present is concerned, by many Catholics as the protagonist of the Reformation, and the name of the Christian Church is connected with his name. Second, no great interest is taken in the Reformation in Italy, unlike Germany, because the Reformation is not a determining factor of its culture and besides the churches of the Reformation in Italy today are so small in number that they attract little attention.

In 2017 the public interest being taken in the Commemoration of the Reformation in Italy is very welcome, since it has led many people to enquire with great openness and curiosity about the Reformation and to ask who Martin Luther actually was and what characterizes his theology. In my opinion, in the case of Luther, it is necessary to consider the following aspects:

(1) First, to present Luther's life and the development of the Reformation in the light of contemporary scientific research, in a historical perspective.

(2) Second, Luther's theological concern must be appreciated as its impact on faith, theology and the Church is still relevant today.

(3) Third, research on Luther to day must serve the ecumenical approach between our

Churches and contribute to the visible unity of Christendom.

History, Theology, and Ecumenism - are the three key words with which I would like to introduce some important aspects of the topic: "Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation in Germany".

### 1. Luther and the Beginnings of the Reformation

Let us start with the historical aspect of what happened on 31 October 1517, to which the Reformation Commemoration refers in 2017, commemorating Martin Luther's so-called Propositions. But whether or not he actually nailed his 95 Propositions to the door of the castle Church of All Saints in Wittenberg that day, research has been unable to establish. Luther himself has reported nothing about such an act. The first to speak of 'a thesis' were Philipp Melanchthon and Luther's secretary, Georg Rörer, neither of whom were in Wittenberg at that time and so they did not experience the event as eyewitnesses. But what we do know is that on 31 October 1517, Luther wrote to two high ecclesiastical dignitaries to whom he was responsible: Archbishop Albrecht and Bishop Hieronymus Schulz, his local bishop, to whom he sent his 95 Propositions.

Why was Luther concerned about this? According to Luther's perception as a pastor, the Indulgences of his time were detrimental to the piety of Christians because many people were convinced that by purchasing an "Indulgence" they had secured eternal salvation. Luther considered this a serious error. He therefore called upon the Bishops to stop this abuse. Indeed, Luther considered that the Bishop's primary task was to "ensure that the people learnt the

*Gospel and love of Christ; for nowhere has Christ commanded us to preach the Indulgences. However, He emphatically recommended that the Gospel be preached*".<sup>1</sup>

This short passage from Luther's letter to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz already outlines his basic theological reasons as well as potentially expressing his criticism and thoughts on the Church. Luther's intention was to make the Gospel accessible and comprehensible to the people as a liberating message. It was necessary to turn anew to Jesus Christ to achieve this. Accordingly, the 95 Propositions began with an article referring to Penance. Luther maintained: all life should be repentance, not only in the Sacrament of Penance; because, according to him, Jesus' word: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17), refers to a Christian's entire life.

This is why Luther was convinced that the Church needed to reform, to promote renewal without delay. He therefore called upon the Church and the theologians of his time to return to the basis of the Christian faith. It was perfectly clear to Luther that such a reform could not be achieved by man. Indeed, the renewal of the Church is ultimately the concern of God, and God alone knows when the time would be ripe for this reform.<sup>2</sup> In the light of this, Luther drew up a series of theses for reform, in order to remedy this deplorable situation. He did not want to found a new church or to be viewed or described as a Reformer. Luther saw himself as a tool in God's hands, and he sought to contribute to the renewal of the one Church of Jesus Christ in the spirit of the Gospel.

The 95 Propositions were written in Latin and Luther did not want to publicize them, because he did not want to discuss the question of how to understand the Indulgences with the general

public, but in a learned discussion reserved to theologians. If we look at Luther's original intention, the publication of such a work could not have been understood at the beginning of the Reformation. The 95 Propositions were by no means a revolutionary document since "they represent quite Catholic concerns and move within the framework of Catholic theology".<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Cardinal Koch stated: "With his Propositions Luther did not wish to break with the Catholic Church, but to revitalize it".<sup>4</sup>

And yet, "in the background of the 95 Propositions there is the presage of an earthquake whose consequences would have been quite unpredictable at the time".<sup>5</sup>

Luther's Theses for Reform stirred the genuine interest of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, the reading of the 95 Propositions in the Roman Curia, and in Pope Leo X's

presence, aroused concern that they might

undermine the Teaching of the Church and the authority of the Pope. Therefore, in the summer of 1518, a good six months after the Propositions had been read, a case was opened against Luther in Rome. This trial, which ended in the excommunication of Luther in 1521, was marked by "a fundamental ambivalence" (n. 46).<sup>6</sup> Luther asked questions about the understanding of the Indulgences and presented biblical arguments to defend his position. But



Posting of the 95 thesis

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, Letter to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, 31 October 1517, in: *Martin Luther. Ausgewählte Schriften Band 6*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> WA 1,627, 27-31.

<sup>3</sup> Koch, Kurt Cardinal: *The Reformation and the Catholic Church. Lecture at the International Symposium Luther and the Sacraments. A Catholic re-reading in an Ecumenical perspective* at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome on February 26, 2017, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Lohse, Bernhard: *Luthers Theologie. In ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang*, Göttingen 1995, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> *Vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft. Gemeinsames lutherisch-katholisches Reformationsgedenken im Jahr 2017*, Leipzig, Paderborn 2013, p. 29, Nr. 46. (The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, was signed by Bishop Christian Kause and Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, in Augsburg, Germany, on 31 October 1999.).

although he had been assured that he would be given a hearing, he was told again and again that he had to recant or be condemned as a heretic. The Jesuit Giancarlo Pani commented: “*Fu un dialogo tra sordi [...] Lutero fu condannato per il rifiuto opposto all'autorità della Chiesa, con motivazioni che, da una parte e dall'altra, andavano ben oltre il problema delle Indulgenze; E tuttavia [...] non gli venne mai indicata la ragione per cui la dottrina che egli contrastava era fondata su una precisa esegesi biblica, sia pure radicalmente diversa*” – (It was a dialogue between the deaf. Luther was condemned for questioning the authority of the Church, with objections that, on either side, went far beyond the issue of the Indulgences. However, the precise biblical exegesis on which the Doctrine he questioned was based was never cited to him, not even an analogous text).<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Justification by faith alone – The central theme of Luther's theology

However, Martin Luther was convinced that the biblical texts were highly relevant since people continue to encounter them centuries after their emergence. He had, in his intensive reading of the Holy Scriptures, found an answer to the pressing, but long unanswered, question: “How can I get a propitious God?”. By reflecting on the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Luther had discovered that God's righteousness did not consist in the punishment of a sinner, but to understand it as a justifying righteousness based on Grace.

The justification of the sinner through Faith, without reference to the works of the law, formed for Luther the center of the biblical message and the Christian faith. Luther saw that the Apostle Paul’s message was particularly concise; for example in Galatians and Romans the Apostle says: “On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. For we hold that a *man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law*” (Rom 3:28). In his translation of the Bible into the German vernacular, Luther added, in Romans 3:28, the contro-

versial word “alone”: “by faith alone”. Even in Luther's time, he had been told that the word “alone” was not in the text. For Luther, however, this was not a valid argument. He countered his critics, saying, “*these donkeys understand neither German nor Greek*”. For the meaning of the text is clear: Paul wants to say here that one is justified by Faith and not by observing the Law. Thus, the addition of the qualification “alone” makes the meaning of the text clear in German by stressing Paul’s intention. In Luther's understanding however, this did not mean that we need to do nothing; our works do not matter anyway, justify God anyway, whatever we may do or may not do. No, what is meant is that, in Jesus Christ, God has bestowed his grace on all human beings unconditionally; granted them access to his salvation. Our good works, commitment, and commitment to the cause of God in our world do not *presuppose* our acceptance by God, but *follow from* it as the fruit of the freedom of the children of God.

But why was the Doctrine of Justification of such fundamental importance to Luther? We shall come closer to this question when we look at another passage from the Letter to the Romans in which, from Luther's point of view, his discovery was linked to the nature of God's righteousness. In Romans 1:17 it is said that “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’*”. In retrospect in 1545, a year before his death, Luther described how this decisive theological insight was revealed to him while reflecting on this biblical passage. Luther reported that his eyes were opened to what the Apostle Paul really meant by the expression “righteousness of God”. Luther wrote that he had previously hated the phrase “righteousness of God” because he had understood it philosophically, as a formal, active righteousness. In the background is the idea that God, who is righteous, judges the lives of men, punishes sin and guilt as a judge. The question that worried Luther profoundly, and the people of his time, was: With what gifts can man repay his debt to God? How can he escape punishment for unpaid sin and guilt? Luther considered the Last Judgment full of anxiety, because he knew that he could never lead a perfect life without trans-

<sup>7</sup> Pani, Giancarlo: Il processo a Lutero alla scomunica, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica 4000* (2017), p. 375 (about the Trial and subsequent Excommunication of Luther).

gressing any of God's Commandments in thought, word, or deed.

The decisive turning point came - as Luther wrote - when God took pity on him, and he looked more closely at the words and their connection. In his struggle with the Bible text, Luther discovered that the phrase "*he who through faith is righteous shall live*" meant that the righteous person lives by the righteousness which God gives him. Therefore, what is meant is not a punitive action, but passive righteousness "*by which the merciful God justifies us by means of faith*". He felt as though he were reborn: "*the doors were opened, and I entered Paradise*" Luther wrote, and today one can still perceive the liberating power these words had for Luther who had drawn from them his understanding of the righteousness of God.

After briefly discussing the historical development of the Reformation from its beginning to the Justification by Faith as one of the main theses of Luther's theology in the first two sections; in the final section I would like to briefly outline the Ecumenical Dimension of the Reformation Commemoration in 2017, as a reflective intermediate step, which is intended to clarify the "path from Conflict to Communion" that has been traced in recent years.

### 3. The Way to a Common Reformation

Every record of important historical events and people poses the question: "How should we deal with the legacy of the past?". This heritage mostly contains positive as well as incriminating pages. This is all the more true, if, as in the case of Martin Luther, this heritage were to be viewed and judged over the course of centuries. "*The path from Conflict to Communion*" Cardinal Koch said, "*began, above all, with the critical examination and overcoming of the traditionally negative view of Martin Luther and the Reformation in the Roman Catholic Church*".<sup>8</sup> In retrospect the past cannot be changed. However, the perception of what happened in the past and how it happened can alter over time.

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<sup>8</sup> Koch, Kurt Cardinal: *The Reformation and the Catholic Church. Lecture at the International Symposium Luther and the Sacraments. A Catholic re-reading in ecumenical perspective* at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome on February 26, 2017, p. 1.

Thus, the Reformation is being reappraised. Of crucial importance is how Martin Luther and the Reformation are told today. "With this new look at the past we do not claim to realize an important correction of what took place, *but 'to tell that history differently'*".<sup>9</sup> "To-day", as Pope Francis said, "*we cannot erase what is past, nor do we wish to allow the weight of past transgressions to continue to pollute our relationships*".<sup>10</sup>

Today, regarding the relations between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church one can hardly say that the two Churches "*share the significant history of the Lutheran Reformation*". They continue to work from different starting points but, thanks to the common features that have emerged from the Ecumenical Dialogue since the end of the Second Vatican Council, they now work in a dignified ecumenical spirit. The introduction of a distinction in the concept of "Reformation" has proved very helpful. The word "Reformation" can refer, firstly, to a series of historical events in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, ranging from Luther's Propositions in 1517 to the Peace of Augsburg (promulgated by the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire) in 1555, to the Council of Trent (1545-1563) (19<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church), and the Schism that sundered the Western Church, which it was unable to heal. In this perspective there were a number of actors among whom were Luther and Melancthon, the Pope, Cardinals, Princes, Politicians, and many others. It is important to make this clear, because these events resulted in the historical Schism of the Western Church. But since there were so many actors involved at that time, the outcome cannot be attributed to Luther alone. Indeed, today both Churches agree that the Schism of Christendom was the result of the complex interaction of numerous figures. In this sense the Reformation is as much the work of Luther as of the leaders in Rome besides other political figures. "*The Reformation in this sense*

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<sup>9</sup> Vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft. Gemeinsames lutherisch-katholisches Reformationsgedenken im Jahr 2017, Leipzig, Paderborn 2013, p. 18 (Nr. 16).

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis' Homily at the Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, Monday, 25 January 2016.

was the event that led to the division of the Church, which is now regarded with regret, mourning, and confession of guilt".<sup>11</sup>

A second meaning of the term "Reformation" denotes Luther's entire theological insight. Here we can discover many aspects Lutherans and Catholics have in common. Thus, in the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, dated 31 October 1999, a consensus was reached concerning the fundamental truths of the Doctrine of Justification, while the Document "From Conflict to Communion" (17 June 2013) came to the conclusion that the dispute of the 16th century is now over and that the reasons for the reciprocal condemnation are now invalidated.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, Catholics must no longer condemn Luther as an arch-heretic who broke away from the old Church. And Lutherans must no longer defend the Wittenberg theologians uncritically; nor honour him as one who had broken away from the Middle Ages and its supposed darkness. Today, a very different image of Luther and the Reformation can be drawn. Luther did "not", on the other hand, "reject the ecclesiastical Doctrine of Tradition, but sought to renew it. He did not primarily provoke a break with the Church, though this has been a result. He did not hastily create church structures to build a new church, though this was the result of the clashes. Indeed, the Council of Trent did not condemn Luther, as Leo X had done before, nor did it one-sidedly reject his reforms, but responded in a very different way by making partial generic changes that were already implicit, without claiming them. The Second Vatican Council acted in a similar manner".<sup>13</sup> The movement of the

Churches towards one another has, in our day, been given a new and very positive impulse by Pope Francis.

#### 4. Pope Francis and Luther

To date, some Representatives of the Catholic-Lutheran Research have opted for different approaches to Luther and the Reformation without making any significant impact on ecclesiastical opinion and regret. With Pope Francis, this has changed in an astonishing and wonderful way. Within a short time he has become one of the decisive actors to give a strong impulse to ecumenism. His ecumenical action is supported and motivated by faith in the Resurrection of Jesus. He is convinced therefore: "that, just as the stone has been rolled away from the tomb, all the obstacles which still stand in the way of the full communion between us can be cleared away".<sup>14</sup> The Pontiff, with his words and gestures, proves himself to be a champion of Ecumenism, a man who succeeds in removing obstacles and building bridges between the Churches. In doing so, Pope Francis does not pursue a "master plan" for the unity of the Church, because he knows that: "Unity will not come about as a miracle.... Rather, unity comes about journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey".<sup>15</sup> It is therefore understandable why the meetings with other Christians and Churches are so important to Pope Francis: "Meeting each other, seeing each other face to face, exchanging the embrace of peace, and praying for each other, are all essential aspects

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<sup>11</sup> Dieter, Theodor: *Vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft, Vortrag in der Katholischen Akademie Hamburg*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft. Gemeinsames lutherisch-katholisches Reformationsgedenken im Jahr 2017*, p. 95 (Nr. 238): *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3994 (2016), p. 315 (p. 4).

<sup>13</sup> Thönissen, Wolfgang: *Zugänge zur Reformation. Katholische Perspektiven in ökumenischer Verständigung*, in: Michael Beyer, Martin Hauger und Volker Lepin (Hg.): *Herausforderung Reformation. Reformationsgeschichte zwischen theologischer Deutung und historischer Forschung (Evangelische Impulse Band 7)*, Göttingen 2016, p. 136. (Addition of the editor: Vatican II, The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*,

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Chapter II: The Separated Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West, 21 November 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, addressed on the 25th May, 2015, in the Grave Church at Jerusalem, in: Address on 25 May 2014, in: *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Holy Land. Sermons, speeches and speeches (pronouncements of the Apostolic See, no. 197)*, Bonn 2014, p. 48f. (Pope Francis – Ecumenical Celebration on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, on 25 May 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, sermon on January 25, 2014 in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls.

*of our journey towards the restoration of Full Communion*".<sup>16</sup>

Pope Francis does not set any conditions that must be fulfilled prior to an ecumenical encounter. On the contrary, he likes to visit other Christian Churches and is prepared to go to a terrain that has been unknown until now. As with a Rosary, each of these ecumenical encounters drawn through Pope Francis' Pontificate, contributes a new aspect and deepens communion between the Churches. Such as the encounter with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Jerusalem, on 25 May 2014; the first visit of a Pope to an Evangelical Pentecostal Community at the Pentecostal Church of Reconciliation, Caserta, on 28 July 2014; a Reformed Waldensian Church in Turin, on Monday, 22 June 2015; the meeting with Representatives of Protestant Communities in Bangui, Central African Republic, on 29 November 2015; the first meeting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia on Friday, 12 February 2016, in Cuba; the trip to the Island of Lesbos with Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos on 16 April 2016; or the Apostolic Journey to Sweden, 31 October – 1 November 2016.

Pope Francis' visit to *Christuskirche* (the Church of Christ) Parish in Rome on Sunday, 15 November 2015, is particularly important for the dialogue with the Lutheran Church. On the one hand, the Pope, with his friendly gift of a free meal, symbolically emphasized the hope of a common Eucharistic Celebration, while on the other, during this visit to an Evangelical Lutheran Community, Pope Francis called on his Church saying: *"I also believe it is important that the Catholic Church courageously carry forward a careful and honest re-evaluation of the intentions of the Reformation and the figure of Martin Luther in the sense of 'Ecclesia semper reformanda'"*. The Church must follow *"in the broad wake traced by the Council, as well as by men and women, enlivened by the light and power of the Holy Spirit"*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Address of the Holy Father at the Patriarchal Church of Saint George, Istanbul, on Saturday, 29 November 2014, in [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>17</sup> Thus, Pope Francis in the manuscript of a preparatory speech during the visit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church community in Rome on 15 November 2015, in

This is Pope Francis courageous approach. For example, in an interview on his journey to Lund, Sweden, he paid a positive tribute to Martin Luther. On the return flight from Armenia to Rome, on 26 June 2016, Pope Francis replied to a journalist's question about the results of the Reformation. *"I think that Martin Luther's intention was not wrong. He was a Reformer. Perhaps some methods were not right, but at that time ... we can see that the Church was really not an exemplary model. There was corruption in the Church; there was seclusion, attachment to money and power. On the other hand, he protested, besides he was intelligent. He had taken a step forward and justified himself for his actions. And today, we Lutherans and Catholics, with all the Protestants, have agreed on the Doctrine of Justification: on this important point he had not been wrong"*.

A few days before Lund, Pope Francis was asked by Jesuit Ulf Jonsson in an interview what he hoped to achieve by his trip to Sweden on the occasion of the Commemoration of the Reformation 500 Years Ago? Pope Francis' reply is an important pioneering reference for Ecumenism.

*"A single word comes to mind: avvicinarsi (in Italian, move closer). My hope and expectations are to move closer to my brothers and sisters. Proximity is good for everyone. Distance is an obstacle that makes us sick. When we move away from one another, we withdraw into ourselves and become monads – unable to meet. We get caught up by fear. One has to learn to come out of oneself, to go to meet others. If we do not, then we Christians also fall apart. My expectation is to take a step closer to my brothers and sisters who live in Sweden"*.<sup>18</sup>

In an interview Pope Francis was asked: "what can the Roman Catholic Church learn from the Lutheran Tradition?". Pope Francis replied:

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which he spoke freely. The text, however, was published on the homepage of the Vatican: cf.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_200151115\\_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_200151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html).

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Kempis, Stefan von (Hg.): *Pope Francis. The division between us Christians is a scandal!*, Stuttgart 2017, p. 51. The original Italian version of the interview can be found at: Jonsson, Ulf: Intervista a Papa Francesco. In occasione del viaggio apostolico in Svezia, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3994 (2016), p. 315.

*“Two words come to mind, ‘Reform’ and ‘Scripture’. I shall try to explain them. The first word is ‘reform’. At the beginning Luther wanted to introduce a reform at a difficult time for the Church. Luther wanted to solve a complex situation. The second word is ‘Scripture’: the word of God. Luther had taken an important step: to put the word of God in to the hands of the people. Reform and Scripture are both fundamental subjects we can deepen and increase our knowledge of the Lutheran Tradition”.*<sup>19</sup> (“vita communis”)

Since Luther was considered a heretic and a schismatic in the eyes of Catholics for hundreds of years, the weight of Pope Francis’ worthy testimony is scarcely enough. And this positive testimony is of fundamental importance for the rapprochement between the Churches. All these positive signs were condensed in the ecumenical worship celebrated by Pope Francis and Bishop Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, on the occasion of Commemoration of the Reformation 500 Years Ago in the Lutheran Cathedral of Lund on 31 October 2016.

Finally, I would like to briefly describe this ecumenical event and highlight some aspects that could help to lead us to the visible unity of Christendom.

## **5. The Joint Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund Cathedral on 31 October 2016**

We are currently experiencing a breakthrough in ecumenism, which would not have been conceivable a few years ago. In 2017, for the first time in history, it has been possible to commemorate the Reformation, which began with Martin Luther’s well known 95 Propositions criticizing the Indulgences (1483-1546). It is no longer a subject of mutual criticism and delimitation, but is shared and shaped by the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church in an ecumenical way.

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<sup>19</sup> Cited by Kempis, Stefan von (Hg.): *Pope Francis. The division between us Christians is a scandal!*, Stuttgart 2017, p. 51. The original Italian version of the interview can be found at: Jonsson, Ulf: Intervista a Papa Francesco. In occasione del viaggio apostolico in Svezia, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3994 (2016), p. 317.

The Common Ecumenical Prayer Service, which Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, celebrated in the Lutheran Cathedral of Lund, on Monday, 31 October 2016, was an ecumenical sign of all that would happen during the Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. It is an amazing and wonderful development “From Conflict to Communion, Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017”. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, 17 June 2013, has made this ecumenical worship possible. In 1521 Pope Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther from the Church. 495 years later his Successor, Pope Francis, travelled to Sweden to Commemorate the Reformation with Lutheran Christians. And not only that: in the presence of the Pope, thanks were raised to God for the good that the whole Church has received through the Reformation. This is the beginning of worship! The Pope himself prayed: *“O, Holy Spirit, help us, that we may rejoice for the gifts that came to the Church through the Reformation”*.

Sometimes the word ‘historical’ may be used too hastily, but it is indeed appropriate to describe the worship that took place in Lund.

*“Who would have dreamed 100, 50, or even 20 years ago, that in 2016 the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation would be host to an Ecumenical Reformation Service to God. Who could have imagined that this would be celebrated by the President (and the Secretary General) of the Lutheran World Federation as well as by the Pope? But on Reformation Day in 2016, it has become possible. There is interest in the Reformation and Dialogue has been underway for 50 years and its future progress studied”.*<sup>20</sup>

What happened in Lund is clearly illustrated by the entry of the Pope with the President of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan, and Secretary General Rev. Martin Junge, on his right and left, into Lund Cathedral. All three were clothed in similar vestments - white albs and red stoles - the colours of the

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<sup>20</sup> Manzke, Karl-Hinrich: Pressrelease as of 31. Oktober 2016.

Reformation Festival. On seeing the three men in white vestments standing in front of the altar, no one would have guessed that the man in the middle held a unique rank in the Church. What an overwhelming sign! On the morning of 31 October, Reformation Day, someone had commented that the Pope would steal the show. He did not. It was great that the Pope and with him the Roman Catholic Church stood back so that the Pope, President Younan, Cardinal Koch and the Secretary General Junge, could really worship together. The lived communion and the reconciliation between Lutherans and Catholics were thus visible and tangible.<sup>21</sup>

The theological theme for this service was the ecumenical dialogue text: "From Conflict to Communion" drawn up by the International Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity in 2013, with a view to the 2017 Reformation Agenda. For the first time, a theological translation is being inserted in the liturgy and so it has a very special significance. In this liturgy, a tripartite structure had been chosen, to express the crucial issues and ideas of the Reformation: thanksgiving - the sense of guilt - the obligation to continue on the way to communion.

In his Homily, Pope Francis referred to the main theology of the Reformation and went far beyond what his Predecessors have said on the subject. Pope Paul VI was aware that the Pope himself was an obstacle on the road to the unity of the Church. Pope John Paul II saw a common starting-point in Luther's call to repentance. Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the sincere devotion of Luther. Pope Francis has acknowledged the results of the over fifty-year-old Ecumenical Dialogue, and expressed his gratitude, saying: "*that the Reformation has helped to place the Holy Scriptures at the center of the life of the Church*". He then said: "*The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. 'How can I get a propitious God?'. This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives.... With the concept "by grace alone", he reminds us that God*

*always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. The Doctrine of Justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God*".<sup>22</sup>

It is likewise clear that the Lutheran World Federation does not celebrate the central worship of the Reformation merely as a Lutheran worship, to which ecumenical partners are invited, not just worship with all the other Protestant churches, but as an ecumenical worship to which the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation and the Pope invite ecumenical partners. This is not self-evident! It is seriously thought that Luther wanted to renew the Church and not to split it. It is therefore appropriate, after 50 Years of Ecumenical Dialogue, to commemorate the Reformation, especially with the Christians from whom the Lutheran Christians were separated by the events of the 16th century.

During the service, Pope Francis and President Younan signed a Joint Declaration, which emphasized two points: pain at the division of the Church and, the common commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation. The perception of the longing for unity is remarkable. It states: "*Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God's redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue*". The mention of those most affected by the schism makes the goal of ecumenical efforts seem more than urgent. Therefore, it is urgent to solve this deplorable division in an ecumenical manner. Indeed, we need to find a solution to this very complicated issue without further delay in our time. Thus, the Joint Statement ends with: "*We call upon all Lutheran and*

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<sup>21</sup> See the report of Theodor Dieter in the municipal letter December-February 2017 of the evangelical community of Rome.

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<sup>22</sup> Homily at Common Ecumenical Prayer at the Lutheran Cathedral of Lund, on Reformation Day, 31 October 2016.

*Catholic parishes and communities to be bold and creative, joyful and hopeful in their commitment to continue the great journey ahead of us.... Rooted in Christ and witnessing to him, we renew our determination to be faithful heralds of God's boundless love for all humanity".*<sup>23</sup>

## 6. A new ecumenical departure

Whoever reads the "signs of the times" realizes that: the dispute over the Reformation, by which the Church was divided in the 16th century, is over. Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians today can acknowledge together Luther's true theological concern: that he did not want to break with the Catholic Church and found a new church. Luther's intention was to renew all Christendom in the Gospel spirit. Cardinal Koch considers: *"The Lutheran Reformation in the sixteenth century is therefore to be understood and appreciated as a process of reforming the Church by re-discovering the Gospel as its foundation, more precisely the Gospel of the Justification of sinful man not by his works, but by faith in Jesus Christ.... Martin Luther and his Wittenberg Reformation are a clear proof that a true reform of the Church can only be achieved by concentrating Christian existence and the Church's life on the person of Jesus Christ as the living Word of God".*<sup>24</sup>

Thus, if the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church can jointly appreciate the legacy of Luther and the Reformation today, Cardinal Kasper concluded: *"Unity is closer today than 500 years ago. It has already begun. We are not on the road to separation, but on the road to unity after 2015".* In this perspective, the year 2017 is an important opportunity and an obligation for Lutherans and Catholics to continue on the road to visible Christian unity, now approaching. *"In a world where many conversations are disjointed, the Joint Reformation acknowledges the importance of dialogue. In a*

<sup>23</sup> Koch, Kurt Cardinal: *The Reformation and the Catholic Church. Lecture at the International Symposium Luther and the Sacraments. A Catholic re-reading in ecumenical perspective* at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome on 26 February 2017, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Kasper, Walter: *Martin Luther. Eine ökumenische Perspektive*, Ostfildern 2016, p. 70.

*world wounded by violence and war, it tells the story of past conflicts. In a world which is unclear about the meaning of faith and religion, it tells of the transforming power and the beauty of our common faith, which enables us to offer compassionate and joyful witness".*<sup>25</sup>

This joint Commemoration of the Reformation, which provides us with the first opportunity to renew the Church and to take further steps on the road to unity, is absolutely essential. *"It would be good for both the Churches, many people long for it, and the world needs our common testimony today".*<sup>26</sup> "Let us", says Pope Francis, *"ask the Lord Jesus...to help us to overcome our conflicts, our divisions and our self-seeking; and let us remember that unity is always better than conflict! And so may he help us to be united to one another by one force, by the power of love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts"* (cf. Rom 5:5).<sup>27</sup>

"We have learned that what unite us is greater than what divides us" (Joint Statement 31.X.2016).

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

<sup>25</sup> The high value of the dialogue testify. Interview with LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Martin Junge, LWI of 15 August 2016 (available at: <https://de.lutheranworld.org/en/content/viele-moeglichkeiten-der-beteiligung-21>).

<sup>26</sup> Kasper, Walter: *Martin Luther. Eine ökumenische Perspektive*, Ostfildern 2016, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> (*Addition of the editor: Pope Francis' Homily at the Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, Monday, 25 January 2016.*)

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD

## The Ministry of Jesus in the Light of the Reformation and Vatican II

The year 2017 is the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation that Martin Luther gave rise to. It almost coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the great Ecumenical Council Vatican II. Triggered by that confluence this paper argues how the double celebration must help the church to retrieve the roots and fruits of Christian discipleship from the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The quincennial commemoration of the reformation movement is an invitation to revisit some of the principles that Luther emphasized and which are also basic to Christian Faith. The course of events and developments that have transpired during the past five centuries as well as the distance in time enable one to review what Luther said with a certain equanimity but also with a view to enrich the church's life and mission today.

As Hans Kung has pointed out<sup>28</sup> the Reformation may be attributed to several persons and factors though basically it was Luther who initiated the event by his questioning of the church's granting indulgence, that is, remittance of punishment due to a dead person, in return for the money a living person gives to the church. The conflict concerning the indulgences developed into a question of spiritual authority which Luther understood in terms of the Scripture.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Kung, *Christianity: The Religious Situation of Our Time*, London: Collins, 1995, 525. The humanistic revival that began during the late middle ages, to a large extent, paved the way for the reformation. People wanted to hear more enlightened sermons from the ministers. (See John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther, Selections from his Writings*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961, 166). Similarly, John Wycliffe (1320-1384), a century before Luther, had advocated the translation of the Bible into English and it influenced Jan Hus (1352-1445) who, though, was burned at the stake.

<sup>29</sup> Luther, in his struggle, sought the help of the Nobility of Germany, as he felt powerless before the well-entrenched institutional power of the church of the time. Luther was convinced of the need for a General Council

The five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation must prove to be an event strengthening ecumenism, eventually paving the way for the unity of the Church. "Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that 'they be one' (Jn 17:21)," wrote Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) (no 214). The Pope went on to say: "The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions and the Church could realize the fullness of catholicity proper to her."

In the same spirit the Pope in his address to the Ecumenical event in Malmo Arena, Sweden on 31 October 2016, remembering the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, said: "We remember this anniversary with a renewed spirit and in the recognition that Christian Unity is a priority, because we realize that much more unites us than separates us."<sup>30</sup> In this the Pope is only following one of the leading guidelines of Vatican II saying that the Church of Christ has to be unique and one (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 1).

Charting that path of ecumenism, this paper will argue how the Catholic Church can draw inspiration from Luther to make the Church ever more missionary, especially with regard to the role of the Laity as outlined by Vatican II. Together they invite all Christians to have a ministry-centered approach to the Lord as presented in the gospels.

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to discuss and usher in reform, especially with regard to the spiritual authority that the Church claimed to have, namely, to change divine will regarding a person who is in purgatory to be taken out by a substitutionary order of the Church in the form of a total indulgence which one could win for oneself or for one in purgatory, by paying money for the construction of the basilica of St. Peter.

<sup>30</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papafrancesco\\_20161031\\_svezia-evento-ecumenico.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papafrancesco_20161031_svezia-evento-ecumenico.html) (accessed on 20/01/2017).

## Significance of Ecumenism

It is widely recognized how the world at large is changing in interactions and collaborations, tending to greater unity, despite the fissiparous tendencies fostered by narrow-minded vested interests. This has not left the Christian churches unaffected as shown by the many joint study groups and inter-ecclesial commissions to usher in greater unity among Christians. The ecumenical ideal is upheld by all churches, more so by the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the Orthodox Churches.<sup>31</sup>

Christian mission has to take into account the socio-cultural context. A core element of Asian culture is harmony and interdependence. This is further compounded by the plurality of religions in Asia in the midst of which Christians are called to render their service. The Lord of the Church reminds Christians how they are to be one so that the world may believe in them (Jn 17:21). The vexing problems that the western churches face with regard to ecumenism must be relativized in terms of the missionary priority in Asia. This missionary priority makes inter-denominational confrontation obsolete and insignificant. The common Christian call to mission compels Asian Christians to make use of ecumenical opportunities to be faithful to the Christian call to witness to the Gospel. While the past cannot be changed, what the churches remember and celebrate today can affect Christian mission vitally.

No wonder, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 500 years of the Reformation the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church have taken further steps towards reconciliation and move forward in the field of joint

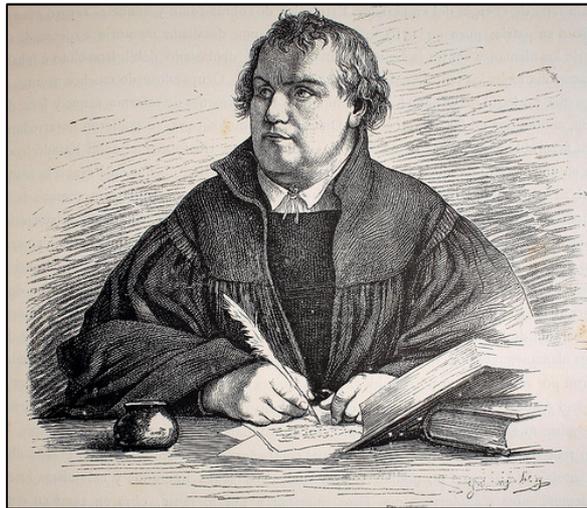
service to express and strengthen their commitment to seek unity. This is amply expressed in their joint study document, "From Conflict to Communion."<sup>32</sup> It advocates how Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world. No 243 of the document reads: "Ecumenical engagement for the unity of the Church, does not serve only the Church, but also the world, so that the world may believe."

As disciples of Jesus both the Catholics and the Lutherans have the irreplaceable duty to be best advocates of human lives, animated by the Christian faith, in a secularized world. Christians believe that the God who sent Jesus Christ is working through his Church, the community of his disciples, to confront evil and rebuild lives. The two churches are looking forward to work together in harmony and collaboration.

The commemoration is a fitting occasion to look back on the events that occurred 500 years back, putting the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the centre with the intent how this Gospel can be celebrated and communicated to the people of contemporary times, so that the world may believe how God

gave God's self to humans and calls them into communion with God in the Church. In that spirit the present paper builds on Luther's contribution in order to make every Christian responsible in his/her vocation. This, in turn, can reinvent the ecumenical dialogue and the common journey.

As the joint commission of Catholics and Lutherans pointed out in its statement in 1983, on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, Christians, whether Protestants or Catholics, cannot disregard the person and message of this man.<sup>33</sup> "Luther's reforming



Martin Luther

<sup>31</sup> See the Declaration on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) of Vatican II. The Church: Towards a Common Vision, (Faith and Order Paper 214, WCC).

<sup>32</sup> From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. [www.bonifatius.de](http://www.bonifatius.de).

<sup>33</sup> From Conflict to Communion, no 2.

agenda poses a spiritual and theological challenge for both contemporary Catholics and Lutherans.”<sup>34</sup> They offer us both opportunities and obligations. This paper will emphasize the implications of Luther’s teachings for the mission of the church especially with regard to the laity.

The 2017 quincentennial of the Reformation has added significance due to the fact that it is the first ecumenical celebration of the Reformation in which Catholics also participate. Equally, it offers Catholics the opportunity to interpret their theological tradition and mission adopting and accepting Luther’s influence.

It is to be acknowledged that even if initially Catholics firewalled themselves against Luther’s ideas, in the long run they had their impact on the Catholic Church as well. A major area of this impact was Scripture. With his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII opened the floodgates of the study of Scripture in the Catholic Church.

As the joint declaration *From Conflict to Communion* underlined the Reformation should be freed from the notion of separation or division in the Church. What Luther intended was reform, not division which was the result of various factors, including the institutional failure to assess the situation. Equally, it was due to the political climate of the Supreme authority of the Holy Roman Empire from which many wanted to free themselves. Nor was it a “rediscovery of the gospel” as many of the followers of Luther traditionally claimed.<sup>35</sup>

Even if the present cannot cancel what has happened in history, the remembrance can enable Christians to recreate the past for the present. They can narrate that history in a fresh way. The many secular events like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (1948), the growing phenomenon of secularization, the revival of world’s religions as well as the mutual influence of Catholics and Protestants, more so in recent times, all invite Christians to a new era of collaboration and unity. They impel Christians to search for what is common among them rather than what is di-

viding them and pursue ways of working towards overcoming the differences.

### Centrality of Scripture

Until John Gutenberg’s (1394-1468) discovery of the printing press, the Bible remained for ordinary Christians, by and large, a closed book, except for the occasional sermons and through art works. True, as pointed out earlier, there were trail-blazing minds such as that of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus that attempted to popularize the Bible by translating it into local languages but were met with stiff opposition. However, it is Luther’s merit that he made Scripture the integral part of Christian life.

Luther along with colleagues from the University of Wittenberg translated the New Testament into German and with the help of the recently introduced printing press made it easily accessible to ordinary Christians. Luther was a biblical scholar and was convinced of the power of the Word of God in his own life.<sup>36</sup>

Luther recommended for the study of Scripture a process of three steps: prayer, meditation and affliction. One should read the Scripture in the presence of God, in prayer and while meditating on the words of the Scripture one must be attentive to the situations in life that often seem to contradict what is found in the Scripture. Through this process Scripture proves its authority by overcoming those afflictions. “Note that the struggle of the Scripture is this, that it is not changed into the one who studies it, but that it transforms one who loves it into itself and its strength.”<sup>37</sup> A person not only interprets the Scripture but is also interpreted by it, which is the power and authority of Scripture.

Luther’s central teaching that the Bible is the core source of religion and authority opened a rising wave of interest and study of Scripture and this has continued to the present.

<sup>34</sup> From Conflict to Communion, no 3.

<sup>35</sup> As mentioned in footnote 1, persons like John Wycliffe and Jan Hus had already advocated the need for translating the Bible into the languages of the people and the place of the Bible in the lives of the faithful.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ronald D. Witterup, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Scripture*, New York: Paulist Press, 2006, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, *First Lecture on the Psalms*, in Herbert J.A. Bouman, *Luther’s Writings, WA 3*, 397, 9-11, quoted in *Conflict and Communion*, no.197.

## The Common Priesthood

An associate idea of Luther, and flowing from the centrality of the Scripture is the dignity and responsibility of every baptized person. In contrast to the prevailing medieval division of Christians into spiritual (hierarchy) and temporal (the laity), Luther insisted how all Christians are priests in the eyes of God and that they have direct access to God. In his letter to the German nobility he put forward the doctrine that all baptized Christians were priests and spiritual, dismissing the existence of two classes of believers, the spiritual and the secular.<sup>38</sup>

Luther understood the relationship of believers to Christ as a “joyful exchange, in which the believer takes part in the properties of Christ, and thus also in his priesthood.”<sup>39</sup> Commenting on 1 Peter 2:9, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people,” Luther insisted, “We are all consecrated priests through baptism.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in his writing, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) he wrote: “In this way we are all priests, as many of us are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers.”<sup>41</sup>

Luther held that all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there are no differences among them, except that of office.<sup>42</sup> “There is no true basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of authority.”<sup>43</sup>

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:12, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ,” he explained, “This applies to all of us because we have one

baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all equally Christians. For baptism, gospel and faith alone make men (sic) religious, and create a Christian people.”<sup>44</sup>

However, Luther’s teaching on the Common Priesthood of the baptized was not at the expense of the Ministerial Priesthood. Thus, in article 14 of his *Augsburg Confession*, he wrote: “No one should publicly teach or administer sacraments in the church unless properly called.”<sup>45</sup> It may also be pointed out how all through his career at the University of Wittenberg there used to be ordinations for the ministerial priests.

Even if Luther made a distinction between priesthood and ministers who have an office in the Church as a preacher, the fact of sharing in Christ’s priesthood is an invitation to share in Christ’s ministry, to witness to the Gospel that Christ did all through his ministry. This is significant for the mission of the Church today which the paper will develop in the following pages.

## Some Key Teachings of Vatican II

As the Catholic-Lutheran joint document, *From Conflict to Communion*, points out, today Catholics and Lutherans are able to narrate the story of Luther and his reformation together, overcoming traditional mutual prejudices that, in the past, frequently afflicted the interpretation of each other (no 35). In fact, some of the fresh teachings of the Second Vatican Council have their remote incubation beginning with Luther.

A major aspect of Luther’s call for reform was his invoking the importance of the Bible and its role in Christian life. The Bible is so fundamental to Vatican II that most of its teachings are founded on the Bible, in contrast to the earlier Councils. Already in 1943 Pope Pius XII, through his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, had liberated Catholic biblical research that had suffered a setback due to the fear of “modernism”, and encouraged Catholic Scholars to use critical methods in the study of Scripture and

<sup>38</sup> See *An Appeal to the Ruling Class*, in *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, Bertran Lees Woolf (ed), Library of Ecclesiastical History, 1952, 114.

<sup>39</sup> See *From Conflict to Communion*, no 162.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to the Christian Nobility, in *Weinmar Gusgabe 6*, p.407. See *Conflict and Communion*, footnote no 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* I may add that this idea is foreshadowed already in the Old Testament when God reminds the people just before the making of the Covenant that they are to be a holy, priestly and kingly people at the service of God (Ex 19: 6-7).

<sup>42</sup> See Helmut T Lehmann (ed), *Luther’s Works*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Lehmann, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Bertran Lees Woolf (ed), “An Appeal to the Ruling Class,” in *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Timothy J Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation and Today*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, v.

this in turn paved the way for one of the key texts of Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.

The very opening sentence of *Dei Verbum* signals the biblical spirit that envelops the Council as well as this document specifically: “Hearing the Word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently...” (DV1). The Bible is the narrative of salvation history in terms of the words and deeds of God, intrinsically bound together (DV 2). *Dei Verbum* made the Word of God central to the life and worship and spirituality of the Church and affirmed how the teaching authority of the Church is not above the Word of God but stands at its service (DV 10). “The force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life” (DV 21). Therefore, *Dei Verbum* admonishes the faithful to read Scripture through which God speaks to them (DV 25). It calls for a biblical revival in the formation of priests, in liturgy, in the Church’s mission and in every aspect of the Church’s life. In short, the document set in motion a biblical culture that underpinned the huge renewal program that the Council gave rise to.

Vatican II was a reforming Council and the greatest impact of this was felt in the very self-perception of the Church as “a sacrament of God’s reign in the world (LG 8).” Its identity is to serve as a sign to the world, its vocation is to actualize and to symbolize God’s reign in its life and through this inviting the world to be transformed to this divine reign and this is done by the Church as a whole. In contrast to the previously held view of perceiving the hierarchy as the main part of the Church, Vatican II defined the Church as “the people of God” (LG 10) with different ministries. This is an acknowledgement of the significance of every member of the Church. No wonder, in the decree on the Religious Life, the Council spoke of the “Universal Call to Holiness,” in sharp contrast to different states of perfection!

The Church as a sign, with the same call to holiness of all members, reminds all Christians how they all share in the same mission of bringing the message of the good news of God’s reign to the world. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dog-

matic Constitution on the Church, rather than beginning with the Pope and the hierarchy and working downwards, in the first two chapters describes the Church as a mystery and as the people of God. The following chapters speak about the hierarchy, situating it as a service to the people of God. Further, *Lumen Gentium* (and later the Mission Decree *Ad Gentes* as well) showed how the Church, as the continuation of God’s mission to the world through Jesus Christ and God’s Spirit, is missionary by its very nature. To be involved in mission is the very purpose of its existence.

The Council, thus, was a liberating and, hence, an exuberant event in the life of the Church, of the Catholic Community.

The new starting point is the fresh perspective on mission, as projecting the image of the Kingdom, always inviting the world to be conformed to the Kingdom. Equally significant is the description of the Church as a community, sharing in the priesthood of Christ, making every Christian responsible to witness to the Good News. The Council’s teachings “make a serious claim on the conscience of the Catholic Christian,” wrote the German theologian and Cardinal Walter Kasper.<sup>46</sup>

In as much as the Council found it appropriate to enact a decree on the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, (AA) and lay concerns were treated in many Conciliar discourses, one can qualify the Council as a “Council of the laity”.<sup>47</sup> The laity came a long way from the status: “pay, obey and pray” or better in the words of Pope Pius X, “the one duty of the laity is to allow themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow their pastors,”<sup>48</sup> to that of being called to assume their responsibility to be actively involved in the church’s mission (LG 30, 33).

As the internationally recognized Canadian Canonist Ladislav Orsy pointed out, already in 1938 Pope Pius XI said, while addressing a group of seminarians in Rome: “The Church, the mystical body of Christ, has become a monstrosity. The head is very large but the body is shrunken. You the priests must rebuild that

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<sup>46</sup> Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church*, London: SCM Press, 1989, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Dolores R. Lecky, *The Laity and Christian Education*, New York: Paulist Press, 2006, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

body of the Church and the only way in which you can rebuild it is to mobilize the lay people. You must call upon the lay people to become, along with you, the witnesses to Christ. You must call them especially to bring Christ back to the workplace, the market place.”<sup>49</sup>

The prophetic words of the Pope about rebuilding the Church got underway with Vatican II by rectifying the disproportionality of the various parts of the body of the Church. No doubt, the efforts of Catholic Religious Orders like the Dominicans, the Jesuits and others, as well as the writings of many theologians like Yves Congar, Joseph Cardijn and others,<sup>50</sup> prepared the way for Vatican II in its retrieval of the role and dignity of the laity in the Church.

As Dolores R. Lecky has shown, “By the time the Second Vatican Council was convened in the fall of 1962, the movements and organizations that had been promoting increased responsibility for the laity within the Church and those that had been exploring the new frontiers of Christian education converged in significant ways.”<sup>51</sup> For the first time the Council was attended also by laymen and women, even if only as “auditors”. Similarly, qualified lay persons like Patrick Keegan, President of the Catholic Workers’ Movement, addressed the Council. No wonder the Decree on the Laity stated: “Since in our time women are taking increasingly active share in the whole life of the society, it is very important that their participation in the various sections of the church’s apostolate should likewise develop” (AA no 9).

AA no 4 while situating family life within secular concerns and as a means of holiness in the life of the laity uses the idea of vocation. The very use of the word ‘vocation’ is signifi-

cant in so far as it was a word used almost exclusively to refer to the call of priests and religious. The laity are called by God to forward the reign of God in the world and in the church (AA no 4). The spirit of God is making the laity more conscious of their calling and their responsibility. The Council made it foundational that the laity share in the redemptive responsibility of the Church, participating in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ confirmed by the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (AA no 2). There is a diversity of ministry in the Church to fulfill the one mission (AA no 2).

### **Laity and the Mission of the Church Today**

Vatican II’s affirmation of the vocation of the laity anchored on Baptism and Confirmation is very much scriptural. Already in the Old Testament, just before Israel is made as God’s people through the covenant (Ex 20-24), God informs the people of the very purpose of the whole process: “That you may be holy and a priestly people, and a kingly nation...” (Ex 19: 4-5). Israel is constituted as God’s people for the sake of a mission, that they may serve as light to the nations (Is 42: 6, 49:6). The role of a priest and a king is that of service to the people.

Ex 19:4-5 is almost verbatim repeated by St. Peter in his first letter to the Christian community: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pt 2:9). The purpose of the Christian community is precisely that it may declare the wonderful deeds of God.

The missionary vocation of the Christian community is reflected in every page of the New Testament. Evangelist Mark is very precise in his call narrative: “He called unto him whom he was wanting to call and made them twelve – created a community - to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim and to cast out demons” (3:14-15).<sup>52</sup> Though there are individual differences among the evangelists the major elements are common to all: creation of a new commu-

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<sup>49</sup> Ladislav Orsy, *Receiving the Council*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009, 36, quoted by Neil Ormerod, “The Laity in the Australian Church,” in N. Ormerod *et al.*(eds), *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, Mulgrave, Vic: Garratt Pub., 2012, 62.

<sup>50</sup> The late Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay made a presentation at the World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in 1951 advocating a theology of the laity who shared responsibility for the Church’s mission. Others like Cardinal Newman, Cardinal Suhard, G.K. Chesterton, Frank Sheed, Maisie Ward *et al.*, had their formative impact on the Council.

<sup>51</sup> Dolores Lecky, *The Laity and Christian Education*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> This is my translation of the original Greek text.

nity, presence of the community with the Lord and mission through word and deed. It is obvious from Acts 11:19ff that the Risen Lord's mandate to be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem and to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8) is discharged by the community as a whole. Interestingly, the very first Gentile community is the fruit, not of any of the Apostles' proclamation, but of the ordinary Christians (Acts 11:19-26).

However, the Post-Constantinian era witnessed a steady marginalization of the laity in the Church, especially with regard to their role in mission. This was aggravated also due to the changed understanding of mission. If mission in the Apostolic era was primarily a matter of sharing of an experience leading to transformation (see 1Jn 1:1-4), gradually it becomes a question of conquest, displacement and expansion, especially, during the colonial days. It was executed by professional missionaries belonging to the Religious Orders, who were sent to the "pagan lands" to save the souls of "the natives". That missionary era began to change with Vatican II.

Luther rightly insisted on the beauty and dignity of Christian baptism. However, due to his polemic against the Roman Curia, he did not devote equal space to the duties that baptism brings to every Christian, more so the missionary character of baptism. It is to the merit of Vatican II that the Council spelt out the missionary nature of the whole Church, basing it solidly on God's love. The greatest insight of Vatican II, I would suggest, is its declaration that God is a "fountain like love" (AG 2). The first five articles of the Mission Decree *Ad Gentes* spells out this love further in terms of God's reaching out to the world through God's Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ and through God's Spirit. As the nature of love is reaching out, the whole process of mission can be described as the divine dynamism of self-reaching out, beginning with creation. Thus, *Ad Gentes* goes beyond what some theologians name as *Missio Dei* (God's mission) and say how God as self-diffusive love is Mission. Church is missionary by nature because God in God's being is missionary!

True, *Ad Gentes* used the traditional concept of sending. In so far as sending is more congenial to a geographical sense of mission, not to

speak of its colonial hangovers, and since the contemporary context of mission is much more complex than geography or culture, mission has to make use of the self-diffusive nature of love as reaching out. This would be more meaningful when we speak of the mission of the laity in so far as they are not, normally, sent out as the professional missionaries.

In Jesus Christ God entered human history and Jesus told his listeners how in him God's reign has come (Mk 1:15, Mt 4:17). Love and service are foundational to Divine reign. When a lawyer asked Jesus what was the basic norm of life, Jesus replied to him through the love command and outlined Christian life through the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37). This is the good news of the Gospel. Vatican II's reform movement was precisely to take this good news to the heart of every human person, in his/her living context.<sup>53</sup> Every Christian is called to bring this good news to the neighbour through the practice of the Christian reaching out to the neighbour.

Christian living cannot be limited to certain devotional practices or the Sunday Masses, but must include a genuine Christian outlook that does not shut out the neighbour. Mary's concern for the wedding host who ran out of wine must inspire any Christian. Reaching out to anyone who is in genuine need is the ultimate Christian value (Lk 10:37). The Christian preoccupation is not so much the salvation of one's soul as much as becoming a blessing to others even as Abraham is called to be a blessing to all the families of the world (Gen 12:3 ). That is how, the common identity of the Church as the light to the world (Mt 5:13-14), is concretized at the individual level. Only then can we appreciate the Lucan inaugural proclamation of the Lord (Lk 4:16-19).

The prophetic dimension of Christian baptism sharing in the mission of the prophet from Nazareth (Mt 21:11) must be exercised by every Christian. In a world where there is so much self-seeking and lying, the very Christian life has to become an unsettling presence, powerful

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<sup>53</sup> The Pastoral Constitution of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, which deals with this service to the world, begins with the words: "The joys, the agonies and the aspirations of the world are our joys, our agonies and our aspirations..." (GS 1).

enough to effect a disturbance in the hearts and minds of the onlookers. Such a missionary perspective is present in most documents of Vatican II but more so in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. Having said how the Church, “coming forth from the eternal Father’s love, founded in time by Christ the Redeemer and made one in the Holy Spirit,” article 40 of *Gaudium et Spes* goes on to say: “she serves as a leaven and a kind of soul for the human society<sup>54</sup> as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family.”

All this spells out the baptismal foundation of mission rather than the priestly ordination or the religious vows, though the ordained ministers in their ministry can raise the awareness of the Christian community of its basic call to mission and to do everything possible that the community fulfils this vocation. Through their baptism Christians are “reconfigured” (Gaillardetz) so as to have this constant habitual outlook of reaching out, even as the Good Samaritan did. The vocation of the laity for mission is not transitional or substitutional, i.e., temporary or filling a gap. It is the permanent call to make present God’s other-centeredness experiential to people, and thus to become “God with us, Emmanuel” (Mt 1:23).

All this is a challenge that the Christian community refocuses its attention on the ministry of Jesus Christ than having an exaggerated concern for an other-worldly Saviour.

### Retrieve the Ministry of Jesus

Dominic Crossan begins his magisterial volume, *The Historical Jesus: the Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, with the assertion, “In the beginning was the performance, not the word alone, not the deed alone, but both, each indelibly marked with the other forever.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Geza Vermes, an authority in Jewish studies, in the introduction to his book, *Jesus the Jew*, points out how the church in formulat-

ing its profession of faith has a “passionate interest in Christ’s eternal pre-existence and glorious after-life, but of his earthly career the faithful are told next to nothing, save that he was born and died.”<sup>56</sup> Granted that that situation is changing in the light of the scriptural research as well as the influence of liberation theology, there is still great need to return to the ministry of the Lord rather than focusing predominantly on the Paschal Mystery or similar doctrinal considerations.

As a historical religion that bases its origin on the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, it is simply imperative that Christianity formulates its faith and mission in the light of the ministry of Jesus as the apostles did. Peter summarized the whole earthly life of Jesus in his very first address to a Gentile community by saying “he went about doing good” (Act 10:38). Similarly he refers to Jesus in his Pentecost witness by stating how Jesus was “a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know...” (Act 2:22). The Christian mission is nothing more and nothing less than what Jesus did, vs: manifest God his Father (Jn 1:18; 14:9) and usher in his Reign (Mk 1:14; Mt 4:17; Lk 4:18-19). The core message of Jesus was the inbreaking of the divine reign, that was available to all those who cared to follow him.<sup>57</sup>

As John Shelby Spong has argued, what the gospels tell is “the presence of God in a contemporary moment, they interpreted this moment by applying to it similar moments in their sacred story when they were convinced the presence of God had also been real to their forebears in faith.”<sup>58</sup> That was the only way they could understand and process the God presence they found in Jesus that was so powerful.<sup>59</sup> The gospels interpret the God-experience encountered in Jesus of Nazareth as the *good news* (Mk 1:1).

<sup>56</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, New York: Macmillan Pub.co,1973, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Steve Chalke & Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, 16.

<sup>58</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes*, New York: HarperCollins, 1996, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>54</sup> *Letter to Diognetus*, an early Church document, taught how Christians were to serve the world as soul did to the body (n 6).

<sup>55</sup> Dominic J. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, New York: HarperCollins, 1991, XI.

In the ministry of Jesus we encounter “the conduit through which the love of God was loosed into human history.”<sup>60</sup> In his ministry he became the expression of the very being of God. To have the courage to be himself, delivered from the need to please, to impress, to protect, to win, but to live authentically the self he was. The key question for Christians is not so much if Jesus was God, “but whether they believe that God is Jesus-like,” comments George Maloney.<sup>61</sup> In Jesus God becomes a “God-toward-others by communicating Himself through His Word and His Spirit of love.”<sup>62</sup>

Jesus is the Kingdom of God, and the theme of the Kingdom of God, occurring over 50 times, is the most characteristic and the most distinctive “feature of Jesus’ preaching.”<sup>63</sup> James Dunn writes: “More striking still, however, would have been Jesus’ affirmation that the Kingdom had already come, or was already active in the present.”<sup>64</sup>

As scriptural scholars like Tom Wright<sup>65</sup> have shown, at the time of Jesus one of the major challenges that Israel lived with was the Roman rule to which different groups responded differently. The Jewish leaders of the time, by and large, aligned with the Romans, while groups like the Essenes waited for God to act liberating them from the foreign rule, in contrast to the Zealots who had recourse to armed revolt. It is in this background that Jesus came with the message of the arrival of the divine reign.

Jesus was not an abstract teacher of philosophical truths, but acted as a prophet who explained the meaning of the kingdom that had been inaugurated in and through him. It was radically different from any of the prevailing notions and attitudes. Rather than finding refuge in isolation, he mingled with tax collectors and sinners. Instead of armed rebellion he took the path of peace, and forgiveness, turning the other

cheek when struck, without abandoning justice (Jn 19:23).

As he taught his disciples to pray for the arrival of the divine reign already now, his constant mission was the ringing in of this reign through his deeds of healing, feeding, casting out demons, forgiving, giving new lease of life as well as through his teaching. He made the kingdom visibly present through his all-inclusive table-fellowships, which we come across frequently in the gospels. “Jesus”, as Michael McCabe, writes, “was not just pointing to the Kingdom of God, but was in his words, deeds and person actually embodying God’s kingly rule.”<sup>66</sup> Jesus showed how he would win the messianic victory over evil and build the true temple through his ministry leading to the cross and resurrection. This prompted the Jewish scholar Ed Kessler to write: “For Jews, the significance of Jesus must be in his life rather than his death; in his teaching rather than in doctrine; in the holiness of his life rather than in the sanctity of belief.”<sup>67</sup>

The Greco-Roman inculturation that began already with the Nicene Creed shifted the biblical realism on the understanding of Jesus as God’s presence ushering in the reign of God, to an abstract intellectualistic Christology. This reached its high-tides during the colonial period that went unchallenged due to the presumed cultural and social superiority of the Christian West. In the post-colonial period few are prepared to buy the claims of superiority or exclusivism. This, in turn, is an invitation to return to the Gospel realism that has its emphasis on the ministry of the Lord who went about doing good. Today, as Dominic Crossan has drawn our attention to, a sapiential vision is needed “for discerning how, here and now in this world, one can so live that God’s power, rule, and dominion are evidently present to all observers.”<sup>68</sup>

The Kingdom that we encounter in the ministry of Jesus is not primarily an eschatological one to come about at the end of times, “nor did it refer to a geographical area or a political en-

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid 332.

<sup>61</sup> George A. Maloney, *Bright Darkness: Jesus the Lover of Mankind*, Denville, JJ: Dimension Books, 1977, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>63</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Who was Jesus*, London: SPCK, 2016, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, London: SPCK, 2000.

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<sup>66</sup> Michael McCabe, “New Perspectives on the Historical Jesus and His Mission,” *Sedos Bulletin*, 41(March-April 2009): 52.

<sup>67</sup> Ed Kessler, *Jesus*, Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2016, 92.

<sup>68</sup> Dominic Crossan, *Jesus A Revolutionary Biography*, 56.

tity but to a set of relationships that actually obtain or should obtain, between creator and creatures, between God and the world.”<sup>69</sup> The ministry of Jesus shows how the old age is crumbling and a new one is emerging right now. This is the meaning of the parables and the miracles of Jesus as narrated in the gospels. In contrast to the classical expositions of the doctrine of the person and work of Christ neglecting the earthly ministry of Jesus, we come across works like that of Leonhard Goppelt that portray the importance of Jesus’ ministry for the church.<sup>70</sup>

Scripture scholar and theologian Sean Freyne points out in his influential article, “The Galilean Jesus and a Contemporary Christology,” that only a historico-theological approach can “illustrate the universal meaning that is disclosed in and through the particularity of Jesus’ life. God did not become human as a universal, but in the particularity of the life and praxis of Jesus.”<sup>71</sup> Obviously, this particularity is revealed through his Incarnation and ministry.

The life of Jesus, with the emphasis on what he said and did, is the guiding principle for the church in so far as its basic vocation is to follow the Lord. Scripture scholars can shed ever new light on that life for each age to follow the Lord in his ministry so that the church becomes the light to the world (Mt 5:13-14). Though the church never advocated an exclusive Easter-Jesus, gnostic writings indeed caused to minimize the importance of the pre-Easter Jesus, with less reference to the historical Jesus. The evangelists, however, focus their readers’ attention on the Jesus who began his ministry by announcing the arrival of the eschatological Kingly rule of God, with the “fulfillment of time” (Mk 1.15).

A follower of Jesus cannot remain encased in his/her own world with little concern for the world outside, for discipleship is a call to be inserted into the very ministry of Jesus by fol-

lowing the same path (*halakha*) and thus to become a light to the world (Mt 5:13-14). Referring to Jesus’ practice of love, N.T. Wright comments: “Jesus shares the pollution of sickness and death, by the power of his own love – and it is a love, above all, that shines through these stories – turns that pollution into wholeness and hope.”<sup>72</sup>

Through his ministry Jesus becomes a divine manifestation, epiphany, and simultaneously, the manifestation of the humans, anthropophany.

Following the Lord can be only through following his ministry that brings one to the joy of the banqueting Lord (Mk 2:18-19), banqueting with the outcasts, compassionate association with the marginalized, and thus preaching the good news to the poor. Through that kind of mission Christians come face to face with Jesus, the epiphany of God.<sup>73</sup> Through such a practice Christians anticipate the end-times already now. To quote Tom Wright, “Perhaps they are the sort of things that might just be characteristic of the *new creation*, of the fulfilled time, of what happens when heaven and earth come together.”<sup>74</sup>

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

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<sup>69</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium*, Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder & Stoughton Book, 1996, 166.

<sup>70</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament: The Ministry of Jesus in its Theological Significance*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., Vol 1, 1981 & Vol 2, 1982.

<sup>71</sup> Sean Freyne, “The Galilean Jesus and a Contemporary Christology,” *Theological Studies*, Vol 70/2, June 2009: 281, 281-297.

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<sup>72</sup> N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004, 105.

<sup>73</sup> Marcus Borg, *Jesus: a New Vision*, New York: HarperCollins, 1991, 191.

<sup>74</sup> Tom Wright, *Simply Jesus*, London: SPCK, 2011, 133.

## Essor des « Églises de réveil » au Congo-Kinshasa Quels défis pour l'Église catholique ?

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Notre étude porte sur les Églises dites de « réveil » présentes à Kinshasa, en RDC. Ce sont les mouvements d'inspiration pentecôtiste qui ont le plus de succès dans les milieux populaires en raison de la place accordée dans leurs prières à la demande de guérison. Leur annonce apocalyptique d'une fin du monde imminente et la place qu'ils attribuent aux forces sataniques nourrissent l'anxiété de la population et expliquent aussi, pour une bonne part, leur succès actuel <sup>1</sup>.

Benoît XVI écrivait en 2011, dans son exhortation apostolique post synodale :

De nombreux mouvements syncrétistes et des sectes ont vu le jour en Afrique au cours de ces dernières décennies. Il est parfois difficile de discerner si ces mouvements sont d'inspiration authentiquement chrétienne ou simplement le fruit d'un engouement pour un leader prétendant avoir des dons exceptionnels. Leur dénomination et leur vocabulaire prêtent facilement à confusion ; ils peuvent égarer des fidèles de bonne foi.

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<sup>1</sup> Voir Éric DE ROSNY, « Douala : les religions au cœur de la recomposition d'une société », dans *Citadins et ruraux en Afrique subsaharienne*, Cahier de l'U.C.A.C. n° 4, Karthala, 1999, p. 71.

Profitant de structures étatiques en élaboration, de l'effritement des solidarités familiales traditionnelles et d'une catéchèse insuffisante, ces nombreuses sectes exploitent la crédulité et offrent une caution religieuse à des croyances multiformes et hétérodoxes non-chrétiennes. Elles détruisent la paix des couples et des familles à cause de fausses prophéties ou visions. Elles séduisent même des responsables politiques <sup>2</sup>.

La recrudescence et la vitalité de tels mouvements laissent perplexes prêtres, pasteurs et laïcs, hommes politiques et quiconque voudrait en appréhender le sens, les tendances ainsi que les implications sur la foi chrétienne et la vie sociale. Face à cette situation, certains vont même jusqu'à se demander si nous n'allons pas vers une ère post-catholique <sup>3</sup>. Ne serait-ce pas là un grand défi pastoral qui se pose à l'Église catholique qui se voit dépouillée de ses ouailles? Quelle peut être sa réponse face à ce phénomène? Après avoir analysé les motifs d'éclosion de ces Églises de réveil à Kinshasa, nous mettrons en lumière les défis que représente cette expansion pour l'Église catholique d'aujourd'hui ainsi que les perspectives que cela ouvre pour une nouvelle évangélisation.

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<sup>2</sup> BENOÎT XVI, *Africae munus*, novembre 2011, n° 91.

<sup>3</sup> Voir Joseph NTEDIKA KONDE, « Le IV<sup>e</sup> Colloque international du CERA : lecture et considérations », dans *Les nouveaux mouvements religieux : évangélisation et développement*, FCK (Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa), 1997, p. 14.

## Contexte d'écllosion du « Réveil » en Afrique

Présent en Afrique depuis les années vingt, deux décennies seulement après le fameux « réveil » d'Azusa Street aux États-Unis, le mouvement pentecôtiste est cependant resté une forme institutionnelle relativement marginale pendant un demi-siècle, particulièrement dans les anciennes colonies françaises ou dans les régions où les missions catholiques prédominaient. Inspiré par l'intensification de l'évangélisme américain en Afrique à la fin des années soixante et au début des années soixante-dix, ce mouvement a d'abord pris racine dans les pays à tradition coloniale majoritairement protestante, notamment au Nigéria, au Ghana, au Zimbabwe, au Kenya, en Zambie et, bien entendu, en Afrique du Sud. Le courant évangélique, central au sein des missions britanniques<sup>4</sup>, a ensuite été radicalement transformé, au sein du christianisme postcolonial, par le renouveau pentecôtiste. Ainsi, au milieu des années quatre-vingt-dix, le renouveau s'est propagé sur tout le continent selon une croissance exponentielle, y compris dans les pays francophones à population chrétienne significative, comme en Côte d'Ivoire, en RDC, au Bénin et au Burkina Faso. Beaucoup de ces pays ont ainsi été « évangélisés » par leurs voisins qui ont commencé à implanter, dans les diasporas, des Églises s'élargissant peu à peu aux populations locales.

### Une nouvelle conception du salut

Fortement influencée par la « foi » américaine, habituellement qualifiée de « néo-pentecôtisme » par les sociologues de la religion, cette nouvelle vague se distingue de l'ancienne vague de « sainteté » par ses prédications le plus souvent centrées sur la « doctrine de la prospérité » et la « foi d'Évangile ». Par rapport à la précédente qui préconisait de se retirer du monde, cette nouvelle vague mondiale, devenue la force dominante du pentecôtisme en Afrique et en Amérique latine depuis le milieu des années quatre-vingts, insiste beaucoup plus sur les miracles, notamment les miracles de prospérité, de salut instantané et de

<sup>4</sup> Voir Ruth MARSHALL, « L'Explosion des pentecôtismes », *Esprit*, Mars-Avril 2007, p. 196.

« guérison spirituelle globale<sup>5</sup> ». Tout en demeurant très actifs dans leurs Églises, les néo-pentecôtistes participent à des groupes de prière au sein desquels les membres manifestent ou attendent les dons de l'Esprit Saint<sup>6</sup>.

Après avoir, pendant une décennie, accusé les nouvelles Églises pentecôtistes de « voler leurs brebis », beaucoup d'Églises établies en sont venues à accepter les communautés et les activités pentecôtistes. Dans un ultime effort pour endiguer l'exode, la hiérarchie catholique a de plus en plus toléré le « renouveau charismatique » que nombre de ses membres et même de son clergé avaient embrassé. Ce vent qui souffle sur le monde depuis la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle n'a pas épargné Kinshasa, capitale de la République Démocratique du Congo, qui regorge aujourd'hui d'une multitude d'Églises néo-pentecôtistes dites de « réveil ».

### Les précurseurs du courant de « Réveil » à Kinshasa

Quelques mots sur le contexte local de cette évolution<sup>7</sup>. Avant la « découverte » du Congo par Diégo Cao en 1492, les peuplades installées dans cette région, en l'occurrence le peuple du Royaume Kongo, avaient une certaine religiosité liée à la pratique des religions dites traditionnelles pour qui l'Être suprême portait un nom<sup>8</sup>. Cette découverte occasionna le premier contact entre le Congo et l'Occident et déclencha une vague d'évangélisation. Mais celle-ci se solda par un vaste échec sur le plan missionnaire car, parmi les innombrables individus détournés vers le catholicisme, très peu furent réellement convertis. La deuxième vague eut lieu vers 1880. Celle-ci fut

<sup>5</sup> Voir Ruth MARSHALL, *op. cit.*, p. 193-194.

<sup>6</sup> Voir Gabriel TCHONANG, *L'essor du pentecôtisme dans le monde. Une conception utilitariste du salut en Jésus-Christ*, Paris, L'harmattan, 2009, p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Voir José MVUEZOLO BAZONZI, *Les « églises de réveil » de Kinshasa à l'ombre du mouvement néo pentecôtiste mondial : entre nivellement et déconstruction culturels*, CEP (Centre d'Études Politiques), Université de Kinshasa, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> L'Être suprême chez le peuple Kongo était nommé *Nzambi-a-Mpungu* c'est-à-dire Dieu Tout Puissant. Il en est de même chez les Ngbandi (*Nzapa*), chez les Luba (*Mvidi-Mukulu*), chez les Mongo (*Nzakomba*). Voir à ce propos : Paul MBUNGA MPINDI, « Pourquoi le christianisme tarde à prendre racines en Afrique », dans *Perspectives Réformées Internationales*, Conférence de Kinshasa, 15 Juillet 2004, p. 5-8.

couplée au courant protestant à l'est du Congo, avec l'intention inavouée d'arrêter l'invasion des arabisés dans cette partie du territoire.

En évoquant l'histoire des religions au Congo, il convient de rappeler le rôle remarquable joué par Simon Kimbangu, aujourd'hui considéré comme le précurseur du mouvement de réveil au Congo. En effet, dès 1921, cet ancien catéchiste protestant va lancer une forme particulière de religiosité basée sur un nouveau catéchisme à l'africaine, avec chants, danse et transe<sup>9</sup>, sur fond de revendication socio-politique. Plus tard, d'autres mouvements apparaissent, tels le *kitawala* et le *ngunzisme*<sup>10</sup>.

### Mutations après l'indépendance

Après l'indépendance, le paysage religieux du Congo subit des mutations profondes. S'agissant de l'Église catholique, le mouvement d'inculturation prôné par le cardinal Joseph Malula finit par porter ses fruits à travers la célébration d'un culte religieux intégrant des éléments culturels locaux : langue, chant et danse ; le rite congolais est né. Chez les protestants, les différentes communautés, notamment pentecôtistes, baptistes, adventistes, presbytériennes et luthériennes, se regroupent au sein de l'Église du Christ au Congo. Entre-temps, le kimbanguisme, considéré comme un mouvement subversif pendant l'époque coloniale, s'émancipe et devient une Église à part entière : l'Église de Jésus-Christ sur la terre selon le prophète Simon Kimbangu<sup>11</sup>.

Ces groupements religieux, à l'origine appelés Églises indépendantes et considérés comme tels, et qui aujourd'hui sont dits néo-pentecôtistes, sont une illustration de la mondialisation religieuse. Deux temps forts marquent leur existence. Tout d'abord l'arrivée des missionnaires américains dans les années quatre-vingts. En 1980 en effet, année charnière, l'arrivée à Kinshasa de

l'évangéliste américain Tommy Lee Osborn va profondément bouleverser le paysage religieux de la RDC, appelée alors République du Zaïre, à la suite d'une grande campagne d'évangélisation et de guérisons miraculeuses sur la place du pont Kasa-Vubu, lors de la foire internationale de Kinshasa. Un deuxième temps fort est l'année 1990, année pivot pour la RDC, lorsqu'une ouverture politique s'est réalisée. Avec la faillite de l'économie nationale et surtout du régime de Mobutu, la population congolaise se trouve désemparée et cherche à quoi se raccrocher, en quête de repères identitaires et de succédanés susceptibles de résoudre ses multiples problèmes<sup>12</sup>.

Les leaders du courant de réveil avouent avoir été déçus par les Églises traditionnelles. Ils reprochent, d'une part, à l'Église catholique d'avoir longtemps « caché » les vérités bibliques et à l'Église protestante d'être désorganisée et, d'autre part, à toutes deux le manque d'expression des charismes, des dons spirituels, en leur sein. Mais ils admirent le degré d'organisation qu'affiche l'Église catholique et respectent la volonté des protestants de montrer les saintes Écritures aux fidèles. Guidés par les missionnaires américains, quelques pasteurs hardis créent des Églises. Au début ce sont plutôt des regroupements de fidèles, appelés groupes de prière, autour d'un berger. Ces bergers prétendent diriger l'Église à l'aide des dons spirituels plutôt que par le biais de la formation. Ils n'accordent d'ailleurs que peu d'importance à la formation théologique classique pour accéder au rang de *moto na Nzambe*, *mosali na Nzambe* ou *mowumbu na Nzambe*<sup>13</sup>.

### La RDC, un pays « surchristianisé »

De l'avis de plusieurs sociologues des religions, le peuple congolais de la RDC est un peuple « sur-

<sup>9</sup> Il faut signaler que, au cours du culte et de la prière, on assiste presque toujours à des scènes d'entrée « en transe » avant, pendant et après les prédications, les prophéties et les messages interprétés. En effet, la transe s'obtient aussi par une relaxation profonde du corps et de l'esprit. Une technique simple est de relaxer son corps en prenant conscience de sa respiration ; la deuxième étape consiste à vider l'esprit, etc. La « transe » prête souvent à confusion avec tous les autres états modifiés de conscience.

<sup>10</sup> Voir José MVUEZOLO BAZONZI, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Voir José MVUEZOLO BAZONZI, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Voir Émilie RAQUIN, « Représentations et recompositions locales à Kinshasa : les Églises de réveil et les fan-clubs comme réponses sociales à la crise », dans Didier PIDIKA MUKAWA et Gérard TCHOUASSI (dir.), *Afrique Centrale : Crises économiques et mécanismes de survie*, Dakar, Codesria, 2005, p. 289.

<sup>13</sup> Expressions en langue lingala signifiant respectivement et de façon littérale : « homme de Dieu », « serviteur de Dieu », « esclave de Dieu » ; ces appellations sont couramment utilisées à Kinshasa pour désigner un pasteur et sont très prisées par les leaders des Églises de réveil.

christianisé<sup>14</sup> ». Effectivement, on prie Dieu partout; c'est vraiment la fête pour les religions. Concernant les conditions objectives du surgissement de ces mouvements religieux, nous nous limiterons à quatre points essentiels: le désir et l'autoréalisation de l'homme, les facteurs socio-économiques et politiques, les effets et conséquences de l'industrialisation et de l'urbanisation rapides, et enfin le mode d'introduction du christianisme et ses effets.

Concernant d'abord le désir et l'autoréalisation de l'homme, rappelons simplement que, du fait de sa finitude, l'être humain est caractérisé par un manque; c'est comme s'il portait en lui une faille appelant constamment à être comblée. Ainsi, dans sa quête en vue de la réalisation de ses désirs, l'homme trouve un terrain propice dans la religion, surtout dans les sectes religieuses. Son désir en vient à s'exaspérer dans certaines situations bien connues qui le poussent à la recherche d'un salut immédiat: la maladie, la misère morale, la misère matérielle, l'insécurité, mettant par là sa foi à l'épreuve. La distinction devient dès lors difficile entre la religion fonctionnelle ou spontanée et l'expérience proprement chrétienne<sup>15</sup>. Cette soif effrénée d'assouvissement de ses désirs pousse l'homme à trouver à tout prix des solutions religieuses ou spirituelles. Il se laisse alors attirer par le marché des miracles de guérisons proposés par certains groupes religieux à tendances syncrétiques que nous appelons ici, de façon générale, nouveaux mouvements religieux (NMR) ou Églises de réveil.

### **Crise socio-économique et politique Industrialisation et urbanisation**

En RDC comme dans de nombreux pays africains, on observe dans divers domaines une dégradation de la vie liée à la crise socio-politique et économique ainsi qu'à la mauvaise gouvernance de l'État qui ne parvient pas à établir une justice

distributive. Dans ce marasme socio-politique et économique, l'homme africain se trouve sérieusement malmené. Désespéré, il finit parfois par céder au prosélytisme des sectes et autres mouvements religieux. Dans son désarroi, cet homme en quête de salut devient une proie facile à séduire. Rien d'étonnant à ce que, par exemple, des malades demandent, parfois à n'importe quel prix, que l'on soulage rapidement leurs souffrances, qu'on les guérissent vraiment.

Associés à la colonisation, les phénomènes d'industrialisation et d'urbanisation rapides, ont aussi profondément marqué les schèmes de pensée et de comportement de bon nombre d'Africains<sup>16</sup>. Dans les milieux urbains et dans les grands centres industriels, les individus se trouvent déracinés de leurs anciennes entités sociales de vie collective, les villages, privés de points de référence et du ressort communautaire clanique sur lequel ils s'étaient toujours appuyés. Ils ont perdu leurs repères sociaux, leur base référentielle. Ils sont donc en quête d'une structure leur apportant des relations humaines bienfaites et les aidant à construire activement les conditions du bonheur espéré.

### **Mode et effets de l'introduction du christianisme.**

Du point de vue des adeptes de ces « nouvelles religions », le christianisme venu de l'Occident n'a accepté aucun compromis culturel avec les survivances des religions africaines traditionnelles. Les missionnaires étrangers ont apporté la Bible, condamnant immédiatement et sans appel les anciennes croyances et pratiques pour y substituer des traditions chrétiennes. Véhicule d'un nouveau modèle culturel, la religion chrétienne n'a pas été suffisamment intériorisée<sup>17</sup>. Comme le souligne Daniel Dory, cette conversion au christianisme a impliqué, pour l'Africain, de profonds remaniements non seulement dans sa vie quoti-

<sup>14</sup> Nous empruntons l'expression à Vicky ELONGO LUKULUNGA, « La surchristianisation au quotidien à Kinshasa. Une lecture de l'autre face de la religion », *Congo-Afrique*, n° 368, Kinshasa, CEPAS, 2002, p. 463.

<sup>15</sup> Voir Nicolas DJOMO LOLA, « Le désir, ses manifestations et son accomplissement dans le vécu des membres d'une secte » dans *Sectes, cultures et société; les enjeux spirituels du temps présent. Actes du quatrième colloque International du CERA*, FCK, 1994, p. 485.

<sup>16</sup> Pour ce passage et celui qui suit, voir Gaston MWENE BATENDE, « Au croisement de l'histoire et de la sociologie. Tentative de libération dans le messianisme africain », dans *Philosophie africaine face aux libérations religieuses*. Actes de la XI<sup>e</sup> semaine philosophique de Kinshasa, FCK, 1990, p. 122-124.

<sup>17</sup> Voir Gaston MWENE BATENDE, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

dienne, avec par exemple l'interdiction de la polygamie, mais aussi dans sa vision du monde<sup>18</sup>.

Face au déchirement socio-culturel, au désarroi spirituel et à une profonde crise socioreligieuse, les masses africaines, chez qui les survivances en matière de traditions sont encore actives, recourent aux « prophètes » des nouvelles Églises pour tenter de retrouver les éléments encore subsistants de leurs anciens modèles culturels ayant autrefois régi l'ensemble de leurs comportements<sup>19</sup>.

### Faiblesse doctrinale et manipulation

Les Églises de réveil s'avèrent dépourvues de corpus doctrinal cohérent. Leur action pastorale se limite souvent à la spontanéité, tant dans la liturgie et la prédication de la Parole que dans les principes théologiques. On y prêche surtout la théologie de la prospérité, l'idéologie du combat spirituel, la philosophie de la lutte contre les liens de la coutume et de la servitude familiale, la pratique de la délivrance, la technique de la « semence »<sup>20</sup>. En outre, plutôt que de favoriser l'unité, l'action de ces Églises se solde souvent sur le terrain par

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<sup>18</sup> Voir Daniel DORY, « Pour une géographie des religions en Afrique noire », *Mondes en développement* XVII-65, 1989, p. 50. Voir aussi Joseph BOUCHAUD, *L'Église en Afrique Noire*, La Palatine, Paris, 1958 ; et surtout, pour la période actuelle, Joseph MATHIAM, « L'Église catholique et l'Afrique », dans *L'Afrique Noire depuis la Conférence de Berlin*, Actes du colloque du CHEAM (Centre des hautes études sur l'Afrique et l'Asie modernes), Paris, CHEAM, 1985, p. 211-224 (cité par Gaston MWENE BATENDE, *op.cit.*, p. 37).

<sup>19</sup> Gaston MWENE BATENDE, « Les sectes : un signe des temps ? Essai d'une lecture sociologique des "religions nouvelles" issues du christianisme », dans *Sectes, cultures et sociétés. Les enjeux spirituels du temps présent*, Actes du quatrième colloque international du CERA, FCK, 1994, p. 37-38.

<sup>20</sup> Dans le vocabulaire des Églises évangéliques de la RDC, « semer » signifie donner de l'argent ou un bien matériel à son Église. Lors des prêches, les pasteurs de ces Églises en ont fait un refrain, voire une exigence : « L'or et l'argent appartiennent à Dieu, répètent-ils sans cesse à leurs ouailles, et si vous lui donnez ces richesses, il vous les rendra au centuple et résoudra vos problèmes. » Dans un pays où plus de 70 % de la population vit en dessous du seuil de pauvreté, soit avec moins d'un dollar par jour, ce discours fait mouche. Des centaines de milliers de fidèles, surtout les plus pauvres, sont séduits par ce prétendu « Évangile de la prospérité ». Ils se pressent sur les bancs de ces églises dans l'espoir de sortir de la pauvreté et de trouver des solutions à leurs multiples problèmes.

de perpétuelles divisions entre personnes de la même famille ou du voisinage. Les Églises de réveil sont ainsi devenues les hauts lieux d'une véritable entropie sociale<sup>21</sup>.

Leur catéchèse et leur pratique pastorale sont notamment caractérisées par des guérisons miraculeuses et des conversions spectaculaires. Lorsqu'il s'agit de conversion d'élites politiques, soulignons qu'une telle démarche de leur part vise, par un changement de discours, à bénéficier du pardon d'un peuple naïf et ainsi, selon un subtil calcul politique, à reconquérir un pouvoir perdu.

Certaines élites ont compris que ces Églises représentent en fin de compte un intéressant espace de socialisation politique, un lieu favorable à toutes sortes de mobilisations et propagandes politiques.

### Dégâts psychologiques et sociaux

La manipulation psychologique des fidèles par les pasteurs provoque d'importants dégâts dans la société. Contentons-nous d'évoquer, par exemple, le phénomène des « enfants sorciers », l'escroquerie spirituelle ou matérielle, l'homicide, la fornication sacrée, les dislocations familiales, l'exclusion sociale ou l'aliénation mentale; autant de dégâts qui restent à ce jour impunis. Dans sa chanson *Elongi ya Jésus* (le visage de Jésus), l'artiste Papa Wemba fustige le comportement mercantile de ces leaders religieux, leur affairisme teinté de fourberie<sup>22</sup>.

Par ailleurs, certains considèrent aujourd'hui ces Églises comme de véritables officines de captation de ressources. En effet, par le biais des dîmes, dons, offrandes et collectes diverses, ces structures accumulent d'importants revenus non encore assujettis à l'impôt. L'embourgeoisement insolent de certains leaders religieux, qui frise l'enrichissement illicite, semble n'émouvoir personne. Quelques leaders sont, il est vrai, à l'initiative d'œuvres sociales, du type hôpitaux ou écoles, financées par leur Église ; mais les profits en sont détournés en faveur de particuliers camouflés sous telle ou telle raison sociale, une « fondation » par exemple.

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<sup>21</sup> Voir José MVUEZOLO BAZONZI, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Voir Fadiey LOVSKY, « Le Pentecôtisme est-il une "secte" ? », *Réveil, Digeste Chrétien*, n° 15, Paris, avril 1952, p. 14.

## Quels défis pour l'Église catholique ?

Comme le note Léonard Santedi, le nombre élevé de ces « sectes » et mouvements religieux indépendants est révélateur d'une grande inquiétude religieuse chez les masses populaires. Presque chaque Africain en porte l'insigne au revers de son veston comme emblème de son identité ou de sa croisade religieuse. Chez beaucoup, les mutations et bouleversements de la société actuelle provoquent incertitude, désarroi et recherche de salut sur la base des modèles traditionnels relus en fonction de certaines vérités et aspects du christianisme librement interprétés<sup>23</sup>.

C'est ainsi que, malgré les déviations facilement repérables des mouvements qu'on vient d'évoquer, on peut leur reconnaître quelques aspects positifs. On observe la création de nouvelles fraternités et symboles, la mise en exergue de nouvelles valeurs ou vertus : le travail, la sobriété, la solidarité, l'autonomie. Il y a un réel effort pour repenser la doctrine en mettant davantage en valeur la figure du Christ sauveur, rédempteur, guérisseur, etc. L'intensité et la ferveur de la prière sont incontestables. Il y a une réelle prise au sérieux des traditions culturelles africaines. Une meilleure intégration des valeurs positives de l'oralité ouvre aussi à une plurivocité, une polysémie du message, facilitant ainsi sa communication dès lors que l'échange s'accompagne d'un effort pour rejoindre la vie, pour interpréter le message de façon à ce qu'il réponde aux besoins et attentes existentiels des fidèles. Cela rend effective une prise en charge soutenue des problèmes de tous les membres de ces Églises. Chacun d'eux, à travers les témoignages, dispose d'une réelle possibilité de s'exprimer en toute liberté<sup>24</sup>. Il convient de souli-



gner aussi quelques éléments non négligeables de la spiritualité néo-pentecôtiste invitant à une réflexion sur la manière de vivre la foi chrétienne.

### « Pensée positive » et pouvoir de la parole

Un des éléments de cette spiritualité est la « pensée positive<sup>25</sup> ». Il s'agit d'une attitude fondée sur la conviction que, pour recevoir la « délivrance spirituelle », il faut faire ce qui est nécessaire et s'en donner la peine, il faut penser en termes de « tout obtenir ». Même si les yeux de notre corps n'en voient aucune preuve et que nos sens n'en perçoivent rien, il faut croire que, conformément à la Parole de Dieu et sa volonté, nous sommes guéris de nos maladies (cf. Mc 9, 23). Penser positivement, c'est croire en soi-même. C'est une manière d'imprégner son inconscient d'un désir au point de le transformer en énergie spirituelle.

En d'autres termes, la pensée positive est une technique spirituelle confortant la foi en Dieu et la confiance en soi-même. Selon ses partisans, tout ce qui arrive à l'homme est le fruit de ses pensées. Une telle pensée positive présente des similitudes avec la « foi positive<sup>26</sup> » qui perçoit la pauvreté, l'échec, la maladie, la mort et la crainte comme venant du démon. Ainsi, en croyant dans son cœur et en confessant de sa bouche, chacun peut obtenir non seulement le salut mais tout ce qu'il désire, notamment la santé et la prospérité, car « tout est

<sup>23</sup> Voir Léonard SANTEDI KINKUPU, *Les défis de l'évangélisation dans l'Afrique contemporaine*, Paris, Karthala, 2005, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Voir Joseph NTEDIKA KONDE, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Le terme « pensée positive », en anglais *Positive Mental Attitude* (PMA), désigne la source de toute confession positive. Selon les tenants de cette théorie, une pensée est « positive » si elle procure du bien-être pour soi ; elle peut donc être décrite comme une pensée en harmonie avec l'univers. Pour atteindre un objectif, elle utilise trois techniques : relaxation, visualisation, affirmation.

<sup>26</sup> Voir Jimi Philippe ZACKA, *Possessions démoniaques et exorcismes dans l'Évangile de Marc* (Thèse de doctorat en théologie), Paris, Institut protestant de théologie, 2007, p. 64.

possible à celui qui croit » (Mc 9, 23)<sup>27</sup>. À l'encontre de ce qu'il voit et de ce que lui suggère Satan, le croyant doit proclamer avoir obtenu ce qu'il a demandé. La « foi positive » se justifie par le raisonnement suivant : l'état physique dépend en très grande partie de l'état émotionnel et la vie émotionnelle est profondément régie par les pensées positives. Toute attitude négative bloque et annule l'effet de la foi positive. Selon l'herméneutique néo-pentecôtiste, la puissance créatrice de la parole humaine a une influence sur la vie et la réussite de l'être humain ; celui-ci subit tout ce qu'il dit de façon positive ou négative. La parole obéit à une logique ne se réduisant pas à une simple communication, mais touchant l'existence humaine quotidienne. Prononcer un mot déclenche son pouvoir de suggestion. La parole positive a-t-elle pour autant un pouvoir sur les guérisons et les délivrances ? Beaucoup semblent le penser en se fondant sur la réponse de la femme syro-phénicienne à Jésus : « C'est vrai, Seigneur, mais les petits chiens, sous la table, mangent des miettes des enfants » (Mc 7, 28) et sur l'assertion de Jésus : « À cause de cette parole, va, le démon est sorti de ta fille. »

### La pensée africaine en toile de fond

Dans les religions africaines également, le mot « parole » est un mot clé. La prééminence de la parole en Afrique est liée surtout à sa fonction psychosomatique. Les diverses sociétés africaines considèrent en effet la parole, le bien-être, comme un élément fondamental de cohésion du groupe et de la vie humaine<sup>28</sup>. La parole quotidienne, avec ses formules stéréotypées, dictons et références, apparaît aujourd'hui encore comme un vecteur privilégié du bien-être de l'homme. La parole, notamment dans son lien avec le pouvoir coutumier ou sacré, est également un agir ayant une fonction magique importante; c'est le cas pour les incanta-

tions des guérisseurs traditionnels et des sorciers ou pour l'énoncé de paroles taboues, actes susceptibles d'exercer une influence directe sur le monde matériel, sur les événements ou sur la vie humaine. On se sert aussi de la parole pour maudire.

À travers la parole, c'est à la fois le corps et le psychisme de l'homme africain qui sont concernés par la guérison. Corps et parole sont étroitement liés, tous deux étant perçus comme des éléments appartenant à l'essence même de l'homme qu'ils désignent ou représentent. De telles conceptions ouvrent implicitement à l'idée d'une parole créatrice: évoquer une chose par la parole c'est l'appeler à l'existence. Ainsi, tant dans l'herméneutique néo-pentecôtiste que dans la pensée africaine, le pouvoir de la parole a une place fondamentale.

### Pour un renouvellement de la pastorale

C'est manifestement dans les défis de l'existence humaine et la prise en compte des réalités de la vie que s'enracine le « succès » des sectes. C'est un fait massif. Même si on peut, par ailleurs, invoquer le rationalisme ou les progrès de la psychanalyse et de la médecine moderne, prétendre ignorer cette réalité serait faire preuve d'hypocrisie, d'inconscience ou de cynisme. Mais, d'autre part, on ne peut pas laisser cette pastorale à la libre initiative de certains pasteurs qui, avides de jouer aux gourous ou aux agents du merveilleux, s'empressent, devant n'importe quelle situation de souffrance, de procéder sans discernement à des séances interminables de délivrance et de prière de guérison, voire d'exorcisme<sup>29</sup>. Il est donc urgent que l'Église catholique mette en place une pastorale renouvelée de la santé et de la guérison. Pour qu'un tel ministère ne se fasse pas dans l'improvisation et l'anarchie, les évêques africains doivent imaginer et encourager dans ce domaine l'élaboration d'une théologie pastorale solide. Meinrad Hebga suggère même, au niveau des conférences épiscopales, la création de rituels africains. Il affirme : « Il est temps de mettre en place une diaconie des malades inculturée. Ne nous réfugions point dans un verbalisme scientifique sans consistance, au nom de la psychanalyse ou de la

<sup>27</sup> Voir David YONGGI CHO, *Une direction spirituelle pour un nouveau millénaire*, Felleries, Eternity Publishing House, 2004, p. 113-114.

<sup>28</sup> Voir à ce sujet Pierre DIARRA et Cécile LEGUY, *Paroles imagées. Le proverbe au croisement des cultures*, Rosny-sous-Bois, Bréal, 2004 ; Dominique CASAJUS, *Gens de parole. Langage, poésie et politique en pays touareg*, Paris, La découverte, 2000, p. 31 ; Geneviève CALAME-GRIAULE, *Ethnologie et langage. La parole chez les Dogon*, Paris, Institut d'ethnologie, 1987, p. 360.

<sup>29</sup> Voir Léonard SANTEDI KINKUPU, *Les défis de l'évangélisation...* op. cit.

démythisation des évangélisés. Ayons foi en la parole puissante de Jésus-Christ, et assumons le ministère qu'il nous a confié <sup>30</sup>. »

Certes, tout cela doit être assumé avec intelligence. Notre ferme conviction est que, pour rester fidèles à la perspective évangélique, il nous faut congédier triomphalisme, tendance propagandiste, goût du pathétique et mercantilisme. Notons aussi qu'absolutiser la maladie met la foi en danger. Dans une étude très fouillée, quelqu'un d'aussi averti que René De Haes suggère que la réponse à l'interpellation des sectes dans le domaine de la maladie et de la guérison se trouve dans une perspective holistique et eschatologique <sup>31</sup>. Évitant de se polariser uniquement sur la question du corps, le chrétien doit aussi se préoccuper de la guérison de l'âme, de la guérison humaine totale par Jésus-Christ, dans la ligne des perspectives pauliniennes (2 Co 4, 16 – 5, 1). En ce sens, nous ne pouvons que soutenir une pastorale de santé qui considère l'homme dans chacune de ses composantes, tant culturelle, sociale, somatique que spirituelle, et dans la perspective du Royaume qui advient <sup>32</sup>.

### Un voyant rouge au tableau de bord

En résumé, nous nous accordons avec bien des auteurs pour situer à deux niveaux les causes de l'éclosion exponentielle des sectes: d'une part, l'industrialisation et l'urbanisation des sociétés traditionnelles africaines postcoloniales couplées à une forme particulière d'évangélisation développée en Afrique et, d'autre part, le désarroi des individus assaillis par une foule de problèmes alors que leur fait presque totalement défaut le ressort communautaire clanique et leurs unités sociales de

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<sup>30</sup> Meinrad Pierre HEBGA, « Le ministère de la guérison : monopole des sectes et Églises indépendantes », *CRA (Cahiers des religions africaines)* 1993-1994, p. 419. Voir aussi Bernard MARTIN, *Le ministère de la guérison dans l'Église*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1953. Voir Maurice COLINON, *Le phénomène des sectes au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Fayard, coll. « Je sais, je crois » 139, 1989, p. 101 ; avec une fermeté doublée d'honnêteté, l'auteur y avance un pronostic : si les catholiques comprennent le sacrement de guérison, ils n'auront plus à recourir aux sectes. Voir aussi B. KIPANZA TUMKAWA, « Le ministère de guérison en Afrique. Chance et défi pour l'Église », *NRT*, 122 (2000), p. 416-430.

<sup>31</sup> Voir René DE HAES, « Sectes et guérison », *CRA*, 1993-1994, p. 417.

<sup>32</sup> Voir Léonard SANTEDI KINKUPU, *Les défis de l'évangélisation... op. cit.* p. 38-39.

vie collective, synonymes de havre de paix. Au sein d'une société d'anonymat, la distance abat, marginalise et fait peur tandis que la proximité sécurise, apaise et enchante. Au lieu de porter seuls les interrogations et problèmes de l'existence, les gens se raccrochent à ces Églises de réveil qui promettent des solutions immédiates et miraculeuses. Au sujet des mouvements syncrétistes et des sectes, Benoît XVI écrit encore dans son exhortation apostolique : La théologie et la pastorale de l'Église doivent déterminer les origines de ce phénomène non seulement pour endiguer « l'hémorragie » des fidèles des paroisses vers celles-ci, mais aussi pour constituer les bases d'une réponse pastorale appropriée face à l'attraction que ces mouvements et ces sectes exercent sur eux. Ce qui signifie encore une fois: évangéliser en profondeur l'âme africaine <sup>33</sup>. Le succès des Églises de réveil au Congo-Kinshasa constitue effectivement un clignotant rouge sur le tableau de bord des Églises institutionnelles. Nous sommes appelés à tenir compte des réalités concrètes vécues par les gens et à mettre en place des dispositifs aussi bien théologiques que pastoraux susceptibles d'informer et de former la population sur le sens de la maladie et de la souffrance. Une réflexion sur l'essor vertigineux des Églises néopentecôtistes devrait nous engager, dans la ligne des propos de Benoît XVI, à une véritable évangélisation en profondeur.

**Ref:** *SPIRITUS*, « *Revue d'expériences et recherches missionnaires* », n. 216, Septembre 2014.

La traduction anglaise de l'article sera disponible sur le site de Sedos

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<sup>33</sup> BENOÎT XVI, *Africae munus*, novembre 2011, n° 91.

## DOCUMENTS:

Brother Alois, Prior of Taizé

# Monastic Life today Communion enlightened by the word of God

*Talk given at the Congress of Benedictine Abbots and Priors, Rome 5-16<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.*

**Dear Father Abbot Primate, dear abbots,**

Thank you from my heart for inviting me to participate in your congress. But I must say that I look upon my presence here with a little humor. Brother Roger wrote that Taizé was a simple bud grafted onto the great tree of the monastic life, without which it could not live. What can a small bud give to the large branches of the tree that for centuries has been firmly rising up towards the sky? My place would rather be to remain in silence to listen and let myself be nourished by the sap placed in you.

But since I am here to speak, the best thing would be for me simply to express how we try to live the monastic life at Taizé. And then your theme becomes very accessible for me because the search for communion, enlightened by the Word of God, is at the heart of our vocation. The source is communion with God; that will be my first chapter. The goal: a fraternal life lived in deep communion with one another; that will be the second part. The consequence, communion becoming missionary; that will be my third part. As for the light given by God's Word, I keep in my ear something I heard at the Synod in 2008 devoted to the Bible and its place in our lives. A bishop from Latvia told us that in his country, during the communist regime, a priest named Victor was arrested because he had a Bible. The agents of the regime threw the Bible on the floor and ordered the priest to trample on it. But he knelt and kissed the book. Then he was sentenced to ten years of hard labor. When we hear such a testimony, we understand how much the Bible has been loved and has transformed



people's lives. We would like this to be the case for us too, and the many martyrs and witnesses today are for us a very clear reflection of the living Word of God.

### **Personal Communion with God**

I start with the source of all monastic life—communion with God. As an enlightenment provided by the Word of God, I will take the account of the Transfiguration. Our village of Taizé is located ten kilometers from Cluny.

Five years ago, the eleventh centenary of the foundation of the great abbey was celebrated. Dear Father General, you yourself were present on that occasion. Our community was invited to celebrate a prayer in what remains of the old church of Cluny and I expressed everything we owed to this closeness. Our community did not attempt to imitate Cluny but it was inspired by the long experience of the monks. We share with them the focus on the beauty of the liturgy, of the prayer space, and the singing, which opens the heart to a personal communion with God. Eastern Christians were the first to celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ and it is no coincidence that this feast was introduced in the West in the twelfth century by the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable. Already in the early years of our community, Brother Roger also gave a central place to this feast. Why is the Transfiguration so important?

The Gospel narrative shows Jesus on the mountain in prayer, in great intimacy with God. A voice is heard: "This is my beloved Son". The mystery of Jesus appears before the eyes of the disciples; his life consists in this relationship of love with God his Father.

When we look at the light of the transfigured Christ in prayer, it gradually becomes an inner presence. Each of us is also the beloved child of God. Like Jesus, we can surrender ourselves to God. And in return God transfigures our being—body, mind and spirit.

Even our frailties and imperfections become a door through which God enters our personal and community life. The thorns which hinder our common journey fuel a fire that lights the way. Our contradictions, our fears may perhaps remain. But by the Holy Spirit, Christ penetrates what worries us about ourselves and others, to the point that the darkness is illuminated. Our humanity, our differences are not abolished, but God assumes them and can give them a fulfillment. Our eyes focused on the transfigured Christ enable heaven and earth to come together in our lives.

Persevering in the monastic life means persevering in contemplative waiting. Being present simply, with no ulterior motives. If we are not always able to express this inner desire in words, keeping silence is already an expression of openness to God.

The Virgin Mary is the image of silent but ardent waiting upon God. She was loved by God from all eternity and prepared for what he would ask of her. Yet none of her neighbors who rubbed elbows with her could guess the mystery that Mary of Nazareth was bearing within her. Do not the greatest mysteries take place in a profound silence?

The contemplative life cannot flourish without asceticism. An asceticism which is not aimed primarily at personal perfection, but to make us more suitable for communion with others. When Christian de Chergé, the prior of Tibhirine, reflected on martyrdom, he was not thinking so much about violent death, but about the 'martyrdom of love' performed in daily life. He writes, 'We have given our hearts "wholesale" to God, and it costs us that he takes it from us by "retail"!'.

What new forms of asceticism are asked of us in an increasingly technological society and one which is changing at breakneck speed? It cannot be a question of falling into a kind of anti-modernism, because modern developments open up valuable opportunities to be informed and to communicate in depth. But we see the need for places where time is given for the maturing

which is indispensable and where listening to others is encouraged. This involves a conversion of the search for efficiency towards which our societies impel us. At Taizé we are surprised that after a stay of one week young people—and these are quite normal young people, living in the modern world—often say that the most important thing was the silence.

One form of asceticism is celibacy and it is impossible to talk about this without speaking of praise. We sing for example Psalm 91, 'One who lives in the shelter of the Most High can trust in him,' and our yes to God is already renewed. We must dare even a poor praise, a stammering. This praise should ascend from our depths, and sometimes from the depths of our misery. In this praise, it is not a matter of wanting to present something perfect to God, but to present our being. We enter the Kingdom of God as people who are lame.

The free renunciation of celibacy involves renunciations in other areas. For example we may be tempted to seek compensations of a material order. But we cannot really live out our celibacy while wanting to have unlimited material possibilities. Similarly, there may be the temptation to see our work as a field that is our own and becomes like a small personal kingdom.

To live our celibacy well, I sometimes tell my brothers that it is important not to neglect the sensitivity to beauty. Without free moments of gratuitousness, of beauty, an imbalance sets in that does not help us to go forward.

As followers of Jesus, we learn that this is not the fulfillment of our dreams that will occur, but something much greater, encompassing joys and sorrows. Our way forward leads us to an ever greater divesting of our own will, of our attachment to material goods, and maybe even of our spirituality. In this we follow Jesus Christ, who tells us: 'Blessed are the poor.' To abandon ourselves completely to the love of God, our commitment for life is fundamental.

A lifetime commitment in marriage or to celibacy is increasingly called into question. People live longer, and psychology sometimes reveals later on the immaturity that was there at the time a decision was made, and there can certainly be situations when it is necessary to leave the path of a vocation. But I would like to insist forcefully on the need to take greater care of this pillar which is a definitive commitment. In this, in

Taizé we are looking for ways of intensifying the time of preparation, the novitiate, and how to renew our lifetime commitment at certain key moments of our existence.

In a life of communion with God, we go from one beginning to another. In reading the Bible we see that God never tires of setting out again with us. We can never tire us, either, of always having to start over.

### **Fraternal Communion**

In this incessant new beginning, everyone is invited to ask themselves: what steps forward are being asked of me now? This does not necessarily mean doing more. What we are called to do is to love more. And this brings me to the second point I want to address: the monastic life stimulates us to live ever more deeply in communion with one another, to a life as brothers or sisters based on mutual love. This is a priority. Without it, a community could accomplish great works, but the sign of God would remain veiled.

To let the Word of God enlighten this communion, a look at the Gospels helps us. In speaking of love, the Synoptics and John express themselves in slightly different ways.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls us to mutual love: *I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you* (Jn 13.34). Jesus has just washed his disciples' feet. Their reciprocal love will require the gift of themselves as a way of following him.

Brotherly love creates a space that is like the beginning of the Reign of God, where laws other than those of the world are in force. The Kingdom of God is a new world, destined to become present everywhere, but there are places and times when it begins to manifest itself. Wherever brothers and sisters love one another in truth, God already reigns.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke speak a little differently. It is not only a matter of loving one's closest neighbor. Jesus calls for a love that crosses all boundaries: loving even one's enemies.

This love is very real. Luke keeps the memory of the demand for justice proclaimed by John the Baptist: *He who has two shirts must give one to the person who has none, and whoever has food must share it* (Lk 3.11). At other times, Jesus goes even further. When someone who has

two shirts gives one to the person who has none, we can say that this is fair. Jesus even goes so far as to ask for what is unfair: If someone takes away your coat, let him take your shirt too. *Give to everyone who asks you for something, and if someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back* (Lk 6:29-30). Jesus calls his disciples to venture into the dynamics of the Reign of God.

A law defines a duty, while mercy is a demand without limits. It never says: Enough, I have done my duty. To love is to forget about reciprocity: *If you love those who love you, why do you expect any special recognition? Even sinners love those who love them!* (Lk 6.32-34). What radicalism there is in this love completely without any ulterior motives!

If, for John, love seems to be reduced to mutual brotherly love, would that be a step backwards compared to the Synoptics? No, because mutual love can be just as demanding as free love. It is sometimes even more difficult patiently to build mutual fellowship with our brothers than to give generously to those who are poorer than us.

It is in the reality of our lives that fraternity must first be lived out; it is in our daily life together that it sometimes encounters formidable resistances. In a community, as in a family, we do not choose our brothers or sisters. Community is a place where we must work to go beyond our resistances. If the resistances to fraternity cannot be overcome in a community, how will they be overcome on a larger scale?

The holy year invites us to consent to the radical nature of mercy and to enter into it more deeply. Can the renewal of the Church as well as of monastic life come from anywhere else than from there?

To drink from the source of love according to the Gospel, we must go even deeper. In the mutual love of the disciples, the mutual love of the Trinity is present on earth. However poor our life may be, it is important to see it in that light.

Our brotherly love finds nourishment in the mutual love of the Trinity that we try to contemplate in prayer. Then we can understand that freedom and communion do not contradict but support one another. The Holy Spirit both gives us personal autonomy and makes us able to surrender to what does not come from us and goes beyond us.



aware of everything that determines our decisions. We discover progressively what lies within our depths.

The 'I will' of our profession must also include the grey areas of our being, all that is still waiting to reach maturity. In the course of our journey, there will be the acceptance of the lacks and obstacles that can arise and force us to repeat the 'I will'. Autonomy does not mean being free of all determinism; that would be impossible. Rather, it

The Holy Spirit is both the one who defends the dignity of every human being, who strengthens our own individual being, and the one who unites us to each other. At the same time, the Spirit supports our ability to say 'I', to be ever more a free person who takes personal decisions, and at the same time develops our ability to go beyond our own will to abandon ourselves to God by fully entering into the dynamics of community life. One can even say that it is through life together, with the limitations that it necessarily includes, that the personality of each individual finds a maturity that it would not have acquired without the constraints of community.

In our time, individualism has become a great value. We should not only deplore this phenomenon. It contains a positive aspiration, that of personally assuming one's major decisions. For Christians the days are gone when it was enough to follow traditions more or less consciously. We are called to a personal faith-commitment.

One of my brothers told me recently: before giving my life in a common vocation, I must possess it. He's right; this is true, and even very important. We must know ourselves, be faithful to what is inscribed in the depths of our being, be free of determinisms from elsewhere. Our vocation is not something added from the outside; the path of lifelong commitment should correspond to the deepest desire inscribed in our being. But then it must also be said that we remain a mystery for ourselves. Psychology illuminates only part of this mystery; we cannot be

means assuming over time all that has shaped our being.

Surrendering ourselves to something that does not come from us is only possible with a view to a greater love, when we sense that there is a hidden treasure for which we are on fire to give everything.

Look at how Christ himself lived. In total freedom, he said 'I' and at the same time he said: 'I do not do my own will, but the Father's.' The more or less serious crises that every life-commitment experiences lead to a re-adjustment of our journey between these two poles, autonomy and surrender. The Holy Spirit supports us in this beautiful tension that can stimulate our creativity.

### **Parable of Communion**

At Taizé, we find that young people are sensitive to this search I have mentioned. Even more than at people taken individually, they look at the testimony of the community. For them community life is a sign of the Gospel. And so I come to my third point, communion becoming missionary. Here, the text I would like to highlight is the prayer of Jesus before his passion: *That all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me* (John 17.21).

At the beginning of World War II, Brother Roger, our founder, considered that, in a war-torn Europe, a fraternal community life would be a sign of peace and reconciliation. The voca-

tion he proposed to the brothers who were going to join him was to form what he called a 'parable of communion,' a 'parable of community'.

A parable is a simple and accessible narrative, but one that refers to a reality of another order. The meaning of a parable is inexhaustible; a parable does not say things once and for all, but continues to challenge those who listen to it over and over again.

All life consecrated to God and at the service of others can become a parable. In a world where many live as if God did not exist, the fact that men and women are committed to follow Christ for life raises questions. If Christ were not risen and present in them, these men and women would not live in this way.

This parable does not impose anything, does not want to prove anything; it opens up a world closed in on itself; it opens a window to a beyond, a breakthrough to infinity. Those who live it have dropped their anchor in Christ, to hold firm even during storms.

The specific parable that we, the brothers of Taizé, want to bear is that of communion. Communion, reconciliation, trust are our keywords. We want to show that a community can be a laboratory of fraternity.

We are grateful that this parable has also been lived out for the last fifty years close to us by some sisters, the Ignatian Sisters of St. Andrew, who with us take care of welcoming young people and with whom a beautiful complementarity is possible. To help us there are also, though they have not been with us as long, Polish Ursuline Sisters and Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

I want first to indicate two areas where our search for communion and fraternity requires a lot of our energies: the reconciliation of Christians and interculturalism.

By bringing together Protestant and Catholic brothers, our community is trying to anticipate the unity to come. This involves going to one Eucharistic table. Since 1973, a door has been open: we all receive the communion of the Catholic Church. And, with no canonical status, we are committed to having as reference the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.

Those of us who grew up in Protestant families assume this without any denial of their origins, but rather as an extension of their faith.

The brothers who come from Catholic families find an enrichment in being open to the gifts of the Churches of the Reformation, such as the centrality of Scripture, a Christ-centered faith, the emphasis on freedom of conscience, the beauty of choral singing.... This ecumenical life has become very natural for us. It can involve limitations and renunciations. But there is no reconciliation without renunciations.

With the Orthodox Churches, among the signs of proximity that we can accomplish there is that of sometimes hosting an Orthodox monk from one country or another, who comes to share our life for a while.

The history of Taizé can be read as an attempt to come and to remain under the same roof. From thirty different countries, we live under the roof of one house. And when we gather for common prayer three times a day, we place ourselves under the single roof of the Church of Reconciliation.

This prayer also brings together young people from around the world—Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox—and they take part in the same parable. We are amazed that they feel deeply united without lowering their faith to the least common denominator. In common prayer, a harmony is established between people who belong to different denominations and cultures and even to peoples who may be in strong opposition.

Since I am here among you, can I then ask: for the unity of Christians, could not men and women religious create more links between the different Churches? Is not the search for communion and unity inscribed in various ways in their vocation? Has the time not come to create more links with the monasticism of the Orthodox Churches? In some Protestant denominations there is also a tradition and a growing interest in community life.

I want to emphasize a second aspect of this research for fraternity, that of multiculturalism. This is a question that you too are acquainted with. We come from all parts of Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas. Today, such a plurality is more and more present everywhere. But globalization is sometimes perceived as a threat. The huge wave of refugees that is sweeping across Europe, and that is certainly far from diminishing, has revealed great generosity in Europeans, but also fears. So we would like the harmony of

monastic life also to be a sign of communion between different faces of the human family.

You know, as we do, that this is a difficult path. And I do not hide it: despite having a common faith, it can happen that we are unable to prevent lasting separations. There are differences of temperament, obviously. We can be awkward and even make mistakes—that is also obvious. But there may be something deeper, which does not entirely depend on us: too great a distance between the diverse faces of humanity we wear, a distance sometimes accentuated by the wounds of history between our countries and continents. What can we do with the sadness which can then invade us? Not let ourselves remain paralyzed. Not stop there. Despite everything, live out the search for unity and reconciliation.

This brings us to Christ: he alone can truly unite everything. In this we would like to follow him. We are willing to suffer for this. Not being afraid of the other, not judging, not feeling judged, not interpreting things negatively, talking together when there is a question. And above all, never refusing our fellowship. What I have just said may seem grave. But it is, paradoxically, the source of a deep joy as well, that of going to the very end of the Gospel's call.

I would like to mention another point concerning the parable of communion. For a parable truly to speak, so that the Word of God that it transmits may awaken those who listen, it needs to be simple. And for us, the call to simplicity contained in the Rule of Taizé (you know that Brother Roger wrote a rule for our community) is fundamental.

Pope Francis says the same thing in other words in *Evangelii Gaudium*, when he invites Christians to focus the proclamation of the Gospel on the essential kerygma. It is not a matter of reducing faith, but of constantly returning to what lies at its heart.

What is at the center of the Bible is love of God and love of neighbor. The Bible tells the story of this love. It begins with the freshness of a first love, then there are the obstacles, and even infidelities. But God does not get tired of loving. The Bible is the story of God's faithfulness. That is the simplicity of this message of love of which we want to be bearers by our life together.

Simplicity of course has to do with the material dimensions of life. We want to be attentive to their continual simplification. But it concerns other aspects. Notably liturgical prayer.

At Taizé, we do not claim to have found the right way to pray, but one of Brother Roger's intuitions was to have seen that prayer was a

place of welcome and to have had the audacity to simplify the ways in which it is expressed. Liturgical prayer is a kind of preaching, a catechesis, an initiation.

As we welcome so many young people, it

is as if we had to take them by the hand to allow them to enter prayer, not in theory but in practice. We have had to change many things to make the heart of the Gospel more transparent and to lead the young people to a personal encounter with God. I will mention some elements:

We have tried to make the place of prayer welcoming with simple means. Stained-glass windows, candles, colored fabrics invite to adoration. Icons open to a communion with God, for they are penetrated with the Bible, as we learn from the Eastern Churches.

In common prayer, we read short and accessible Bible texts, keeping the more difficult texts for a catechesis which takes place every day outside of the common prayer.

We have discovered how important it is to have a long time of silence after the reading: eight to ten minutes. This may be surprising but, as I said, the young people enter it willingly. This silence allows us to be alone with God,



even in a large congregation. In the silence, a few words from the Bible can grow in us. In long silences when apparently nothing is happening, God is at work, without our knowing how.

The so-called 'Taizé songs' help support a contemplative life. Singing one phrase from Scripture or tradition for a few minutes favors internalization. A sung phrase can be easily learned by heart and can accompany us during the day. And singing together helps to create unity among the participants.

After the celebration of common prayer each evening some of the brothers, some of the sisters I mentioned, and also priests are available, while the singing continues, for confession or to listen to young people who wish to express something of themselves. We cannot stress enough the importance of listening. Brother Roger often reminded us that we are not spiritual masters, but men of listening. This is true whether we lead a pastoral life or whether another type of work is required of us.

In the liturgy, we try not to multiply the symbols but to highlight a few, keeping their simplicity: for example, on Friday night we place the icon of the cross on the ground. All can come and place their forehead on the cross, expressing by this gesture that they entrust to Christ their personal burdens and the suffering of the world. On Saturday evening, the whole church is illuminated by small candles that each person holds in his or her hand, as a sign of resurrection. In this way every weekend recalls the paschal mystery.

### Conclusion

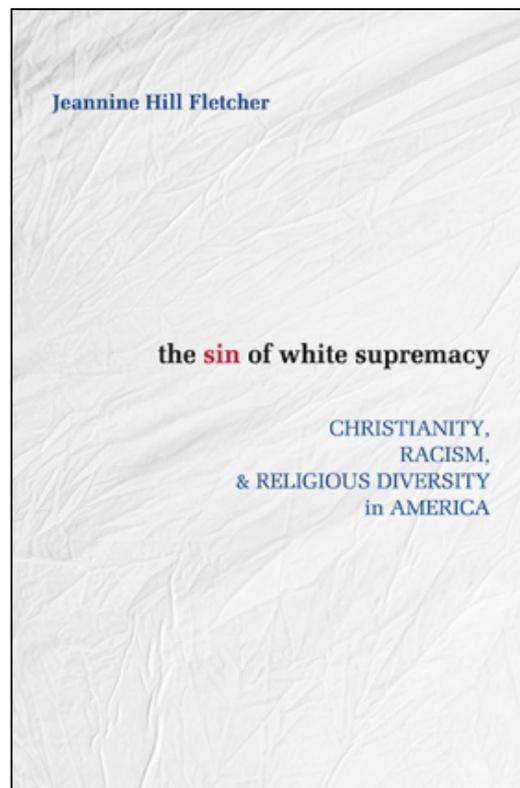
I will conclude. Communion or, to use a more accessible word, brotherhood, is at the heart of the Word of God. So must not we Christians be first in line to try and realize the brotherhood inaugurated by Christ, and help give a more fraternal face to the societies of tomorrow? The language of brotherhood speaks to believers and non-believers.

Without wishing to impose themselves, Christians can promote the globalization of solidarity that excludes no people, no person. Perhaps all we can do is to create, by our communities, seeds of fraternity, sowing tiny seeds of trust and peace.

I think again of our closeness to Cluny. The monks of Cluny had the ability to cross the borders of Europe. There were monasteries everywhere. Abbot Mayeul went from one monastery to another, from one country to another. He also received people from everywhere, turning Cluny into a crossroads. This example encourages us to search with young people from all continents the inner sources which allow us to live as one human family, despite cultural differences.

The monks of Cluny remain witnesses that in history, a small number of people have sometimes been enough to tip the scales towards peace. God could be revealed because a few people—think of Abraham and Mary—believed that nothing was impossible for him. What changes the world it is not so much spectacular actions, but daily persistence in prayer, in peace of heart and in human goodness.

*Alliance for International Monasticism  
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## **Silence – Notes on Scorsese’s new Film**

Recently, Martin Scorsese’s film version of Shūsaku Endō’s novel *Silence* has been presented in the movie halls and has received a generally positive response. Both the novel and the film refer to the history of the Christian martyrs in 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan, thus to mission, faith, obedience, cultural adaptation and, most of all, human suffering and God’s silence.

### **A story**

Scorsese’s film starts with some Japanese Christians and European Jesuit priests who are submitted to severe torture at the hot water springs of Mount Unzen (Japan). One of these priests, Father Ferreira, renounces his Christian faith and he is spared further torture. Then the film turns to a Portuguese Seminary where Ferreira’s former students can’t believe their dear master’s lapse. So, two of them, Rodrigues and Garpe, set out to trace the truth of the story, to find their master and eventually to serve the abandoned Japanese Christians, if necessary at the price of their own martyrdom. They find someone to take them to Japan, Kichijiro, a drunkard and sad figure, himself a (former) Christian.

When they arrive in Japan, they meet hidden Christians and can administer the sacraments to them. However, they have to keep hiding and go about their mission in an underground manner. Eventually, the authorities discover the movement and after several confusing interventions by Kichijiro, many of the Japanese Christians are arrested, tortured and killed and the two priests end up in prison as well.

The local Governor Inoue then tries to convince the priests of their hopeless situation and offers to release them once they abandon their Christian faith – as Ferreira is reported to have done before them. Kichijiro appears several times, only to betray the priests once again and to ask at the next opportunity for forgiveness and to be allowed to go to confession. The

torture takes a more radical turn when Rodrigues is forced to witness the torture of his fellow Christians without being involved himself: As soon as he renounces his faith, the torture of the others would stop.

In one of the central moments, Rodrigues meets Ferreira: In fact, Ferreira has left his Christian faith behind, has got married to a Japanese lady and is dedicated to study and to translate Japanese sciences and wisdom. He explains to Rodrigues that giving up the Christian tradition does not really affect Jesus Christ, as Christ had redeemed also the traitors long ago. Moreover, he had also discovered that the Japanese Christians had understood central Christian articles of faith in an erroneous way, so Christianity had not really taken root in Japanese culture. Thus, in the end Rodrigues too somehow reaches a point of tranquillity of mind after his repeated renunciations of the faith, he assists the authorities in tracing Christian elements in the goods and books which come to Japan. After his death, at his cremation his wife slips a cross into his open hands – probably as a sign of fidelity of yet another hidden Christian.

### **Regarding history**

Christian faith came to Japan with Francis Xavier, SJ, in 1549 and became quite attractive<sup>1</sup>. In the following 90 years, as many as 400.000 Japanese turned to Christian faith. This had to do with the situation of Buddhism in Japan, with many different Schools and competing ideologies, as well as with the political situation of local governors, some of whom converted with all their subjects. In the course of political unification Buddhist opposition in the form of monks and their monasteries were crushed as well as any other alternative powers, like the Christians. Particularly under Toyotomi Hide-

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the history, see Denis Gira’s comments in *Études*: : *Missions jésuites au Japon. Entretien avec Denis Gira*, *Études* n° 4236, Mars 2017, 65-75.

yoshi after 1587, the persecution became more severe, and under his successor, Tokugawa Ieyasu after 1614, the Catholic Church was practically destroyed, with several thousand martyrs. After 1639, the country was sealed off from contacts with foreign countries, except for trade relations with the (Protestant) Dutch. Some Christians remained in hiding and kept their faith in a secret way for two centuries.

### The film

In 1966, Shūsaku Endō published his novel *Silence*. Endō (1923–1996) was a Japanese Catholic writer and struggled in this book to describe the relation between the Christian faith and Japanese culture. Martin Scorsese (born in 1942 in New York), a US-Italian filmmaker, is well known for his film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988 (after Nikos Kazantzakis' novel). In the context of the discussions around this film, he came to know about Endō's novel. It became a long-term project he worked on, until he managed to finish this film last year.

"Silence" has become a great movie with some visible influence from the movies of the legendary Japanese film producer Akira Kurosawa. The Japanese landscape, the climate, the temples – all are thankful for movie taking. The chirping of cicadas (*semi*) at the beginning and end of the movie is surely taken in the midst of a hot summer in Japan, and creates the whole atmosphere. Also, the characters, such as the Inquisitor, are very well chosen and they act very naturally – some are a bit too fat for their time as they ate only fish and rice. The poor Japanese Kichijiro actually represents the figure of Judas, who loves the priest, but also loves life, and the rich Japanese Governor Inoue plays the role of the devil in a genius way, tempting the priest to let go his faith.

### Interreligious aspects

The interreligious aspect comes strongly to the fore in its negative aspect. Especially when the older priest Ferreira explains the weaknesses of the Christian faith. He talks about God being called in Japanese *Dainichi*, meaning "Great Sun". What is not related, however, is that *Dainichi Nyorai* is up this day venerated by

many, especially in the Shingon and Tendai Esoteric Buddhist schools of Japan, as the Cosmic Buddha and has many aspects similar to the Christian God. This coincidence was one of the reasons why that term was put aside, and instead the Latin term of *Deus* was used later on to replace the term *Dainichi*. However, even this Latin word when pronounced by a Japanese, sounds like *dai-uso* which means "great lie". Therefore, also this term was abandoned. Today, the word for God in the Japanese language is *Kami*. Unfortunately, also this Chinese character does not express well the unicity of God, because it is used in the plural in Shintoism when they speak about "the gods" (*kamigami*), and has a strong connotation with the "spirits".

On the other hand, even Japanese Buddhists use this term, which makes dialogue with them easy. In China, the term "Tenshu" – Lord of Heaven – has been the usual translation, with good reasons for the "Our Father".

### Stepping on the Cross

The whole problem of the *fumi-e* – stepping on the Cross to show one's renunciation of the faith – is of course typical for Japan where the form is often more important than the content. Look at the Japanese food, how nicely it is always presented. For them, the food tastes nice when it looks nice. Form is important in Japanese culture, as is ritual in Japanese religion. There is for instance a possible influence of the way the Catholic priests performed the Eucharist and the way of the tea-ceremony.

However, the problem of *fumi-e* goes beyond all this and is cross-cultural and of all time. Stepping on a picture of a beloved no one will do, unless in great anger. To do this in front of others makes it even shameful. "Shame" (*haji*) is one of the greatest difficulties in Japanese society. To come out for your Christian faith is a difficulty even now in Japanese society and means sometimes to be marginalised from the family or even from the village. Mostly the person will ask for Baptism only when his or her family members have died or live abroad, or he or she will do it in secret. One cannot understand traditional Japanese Christians without this historical background of two hundred years

of persecution. They are very attached to the tradition.

Among the “Kirisutan”, the hidden Christians, Buddhist statues were used to represent Jesus (*Miroku Bosatsu*) or Maria (*Kannon Bosatsu*). This shows indirectly the closeness of the two religions. These statues were not imported from abroad, as is shown in the movie, but made by the people themselves. They themselves made a little cross in the back of a statue to “christianise” it.

Some Kirisutan followers did not opt to become members of the Roman-Catholic Church because they would have to change their way of life. My feeling is that in Shûsaku Endô’s book the two possible reactions are left open, where as in the movie the last one, namely to deny one’s faith, has become central almost. What for one is betrayal, can be for another an act of love for neighbour. However, the aspect of reconciliation comes across in the figure of Judas, Kichijiro.

### A film is a film

There are many references to the Japanese history of Christianity in this film, like the reference to Fr. Alexander Valignano as the head of the mission and interlocutor of the missionaries, who nevertheless had passed away 35 years before the film starts. But “Silence” is not a documentary film nor a history book to inform people about the facts of Jesuits and Japanese Christians in the 1640s, nor on mission or persecution. Actually, a good film – or novel, in this case – may use historical material to discuss contemporary topics. With that in view, the film may offer perspectives well beyond the director’s intentions. In that sense, the occasional historical “errors” in the film are not important.

It should be recalled that Scorsese considers himself a spiritual searcher<sup>2</sup>. From his early childhood he lived between the mafia and their violent gangs in New York and the attraction of Catholicism. He actually spent some time in a seminary in order to become a Catholic priest. Many of his films deal with the question of violence and the possibilities of reconciliation and forgiveness, often beneath the surface.

### Inspirations and questions

Regarding mission, there is of course the question of the *local culture*. Ferreira discovered the rich wisdom of Japanese culture, though he finds it lacking in the sciences. He dedicates himself to translating and study, the



A scene from the film “Silence”, M.Scorsese

religious aspects are excluded from this course of events. The film shows in part the difficulty of a common language: The newly arrived Jesuits do not really understand the hidden Christians in their language, there are some

key words in Portuguese which the Japanese Christians remember and pronounce, in order to bring about some communication. But there is no religious instruction and no way of getting across the Christian message. The consequence must be, as Ferreira discovers, a confusion of meanings and double belonging.

The film also raises the question of *religion and violence*. Apparently, Rodrigues and before him Ferreira found inner peace once they didn’t follow their Christian religion any more. Inoue, the powerful and apparently “friendly” governor and counterpart of the Jesuits, tells Rodrigues a compelling story: A gentleman has a lot of trouble with his four concubines, as each of them desperately tries to win his favour and therefore quarrel all the time among themselves and cause him unrest and trouble. So he decides to get rid

<sup>2</sup> See his interview: James Martin, Le Silence et la Compassion. Entretien entre James Martin et Martin Scorsese, in *Études* n° 4236, Mars 2017, 77-86.

of all four of them. Rodrigues, the chaste Jesuit, finds the gentleman's solution practical and wise. But Inoue interprets the four concubines as the European powers wooing Japan: England, Holland, Spain and Portugal want to win Japan's favour for trade. In order to obtain peace and well-being, Japan must get rid of these foreign influences, the governor suggests.

This story of the gentleman and the concubines contains another theme: The accusation of causing trouble for Japan lies with the four religions from England, Holland, Spain and Portugal. However, it is not religion which motivates these four nations to relate to Japan but it is business and trade. The religious underpinning of each of these nations is not really important at all, however it is religion which is blamed for the trouble, in the film as in many discussions.

It is interesting to observe how *torture* for Fr. Rodrigues takes different shapes: There is at first the danger to be taken prisoner. Rodrigues and Garpe are seen as strengthening each other for the moment they may face martyrdom. But for Rodrigues, the really difficult torture is not his own suffering. Actually, he is kept quite well, but he has to observe how others are subjected to trial and suffering. This is the situation of many believers: Rodrigues would quite happily accept to be tortured because of this fellowship and fidelity to Christ. But the trouble is that his fidelity leads to the terrible suffering of others and the poor and unimportant Japanese Christians would be spared immediately if only he would renounce his faith.

A last question: When Rodrigues finally dies in peace and harmony, shown by his caring wife who remains in total control of herself and does not show any sign of mourning (probably meant to express the highest respect and dedication to dignified mourning among Japanese), she slips a little cross into his hands placed in Buddhist meditation (this scene is Scorsese's own, it does not come from the novel). Maybe, Scorsese returns with this sign to his own religious perspective: There must be redemption and it comes in the ritual form of a little sign. He does not allow final silence. In a similar way, Kichijiro also is depicted with a repeated urge for reconciliation. He confesses his sins in Japanese, and Rodrigues most likely does not understand his language, but confession and absolution take place

“somehow”: a ritual to return to a religious state of innocence, preparing the person for the next inevitable act of betrayal.

## Silence

The central theme of this film is the *silence of God*. It becomes quite challenging when the Jesuits are faced with the torture of the Japanese Christians. Rodrigues and Garpe pray for answers, but they are always faced with yet another complication and persecution. Their adversaries seem to be right: there is no God to answer the plight of the tortured, the suffering goes on and on. Thus, the film states once again and quite impressively the difficult task of a theodicy: What happens to God, who is God in the face of suffering, and more so of senseless torture inflicted on the innocent? And what happens to faith and the faithful when apparently God does not react to the prayers and suffering of the faithful?

“Silence” takes this drama very far. At some stage, Jesus Christ himself talks to the Jesuits and encourages them to step on the *fumi-e* without fear, since Christ himself has already gone through all suffering. Faith and fellowship no longer depend on external signs of fidelity. Moreover, Jesus sticks to those who have betrayed him – Judas comes into focus once again, in the pathetic figure of Kichijiro who has so often renounced faith and yet always returns looking for forgiveness and absolution. Yet failing and betraying so often, it is still this Judas “Kichijiro” who returns to the tortured and stays at their side – maybe it is a viable option also for “ordinary” Christians.

The title of the book and of the film is “Silence” (*chinmoku*). It has been strongly interpreted as the silence of God, but can also be related to the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*kuu, mu, sunyata*). It is in silence that the priest finds an answer to his problems, and it is in emptiness (silence) of the mind that the Buddhist monk will find a lasting truth (wisdom) and an egoless love (compassion).

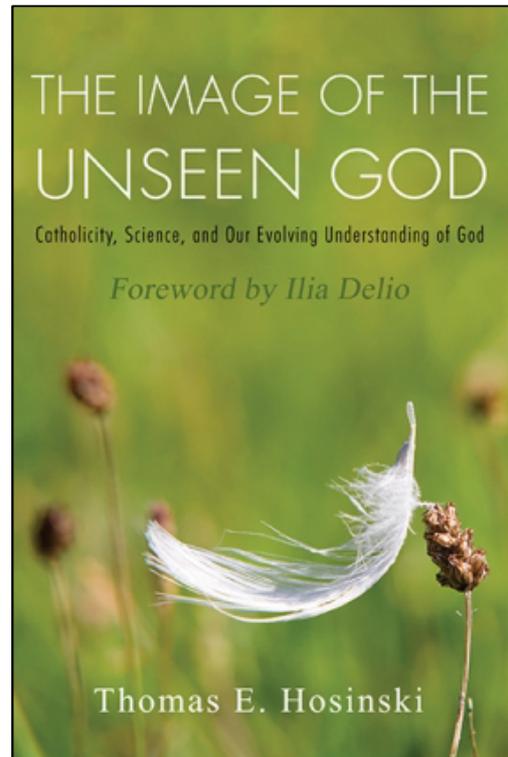
Probably, for many people in society, the human suffering which nobody can ignore in today's media society, no longer leads to God's silence. Rather, they may experience their own inability to relate to “the divine” or to a re-

deeming God. It may not be silence but more a lack of words and relation to know what to do with suffering. Maybe Kichijiro is a way out: Return to the suffering and to the tortured, as Christ is there, according to Rodrigues' reflection, not that far from what is written in the *Gospel according to Matthew 25,40*:

*The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

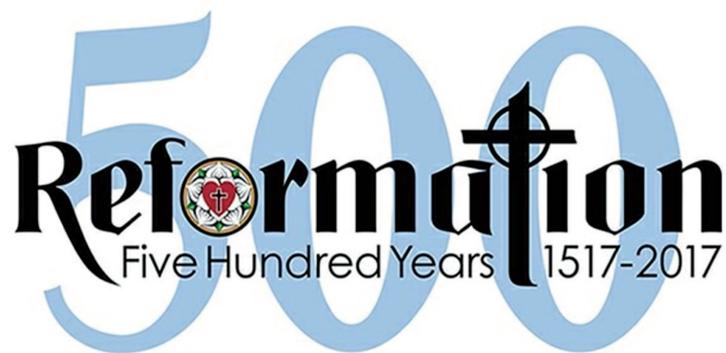
Christian Tauchner, *SVD*  
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(Written for the Journal **Spiritus**)



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The logo features the number '500' in a large, light blue, sans-serif font. The word 'Reformation' is written in a black, gothic-style font, with the 'o' containing a circular emblem of a heart with a cross. Below the word, the text 'Five Hundred Years 1517-2017' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a white background within a teal border.

# 500 Reformation

Five Hundred Years 1517-2017

**On Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, at 10 a.m.**, we will celebrate the end of the Commemoration of the 500 Years Reformation with our Protestant brothers and sisters.

The ***Ecumenical Celebration*** will be held at the Lutheran Church of Rome, (“Christuskirche”), Via Sicilia 70.

We have invited Fr. Heiner Wilmer, SCJ, Superior General of the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians) to speak about his experience of Ecumenism during the celebration.

**SEDOS will also cooperate in the liturgy and other aspects of this event that will take place from 10.00 a.m.**

**YOU ARE ALL VERY WELCOME!  
WE LOOK FORWARD  
TO MEETING YOU THERE!**