

No 2

EUROPE: A MISSION CONTINENT?

EUROPEAN MISSION STUDIES, NO. 2

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC MISSIOLOGISTS

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Preface to the series

With this book, we want to launch a new series dedicated to missiological reflection: *European Mission Studies*. As the world at the beginning of the 21st century is changing, similarly should follow our understanding of Christian missions. That was always a case in the past. Understanding of evangelization was different in the Antiquity, in the Middle Ages and the Age of Discoveries. Generally by “missions” we understand the crossing of the border between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence. But today the border is more fluid. This classical “black-white” division is not so obvious. The principal “way” of mission is always proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and celebration of the new life in community. Among many new dimensions of this contemporary reality of evangelization we see more and more attention paid to the different cultures, different social realities and different religions which influence Christian witness, service, and worship.

Even though missiology starts with the theological perspective, it needs help of other academic disciplines. Two thousand years of Christian missions offers very rich experience, in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, sociology and religious studies, which could be well used in the contemporary missiological reflection.

We hope that this new series will become a chance for the Catholic reflection on missiological issues from the European perspective. Although it starts as an initiative of three centers of central-western Europe, we want to be open for any serious methodological reflection on missions of the Church without regard for any academic disciplinary, national or denominational boundaries.

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EUROPE: A MISSION CONTINENT?

ED. BY FRANS WIJSEN SMA & WOJCIECH KLUJ OMI



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Introduction Europe, A Mission Continent?

FRANS WIJSEN, SMA

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In 2018, it had been 75 years since the French theologians Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel published their book *La France. Pays de Mission* (Paris: Spes 1943). The book came as a shock to many. Was France, the heartland of Catholicism, really a territory for missionaries? It signified a break-through in European missiology. For scholars of European mission history the shock came as a surprise, as overseas mission was derived from European mission, and certainly not the other way around. It took until the Second Vatican Council before Godin and Daniel's ideas became more accepted. According to Karl Rahner the Second Vatican Council was the first manifestation of the World Church. After the Council, concepts such as 'mission in six continents' and 'mutual missionary assistance of churches' became widely accepted, at least in theory. In practice, dominant mission thinking retained the notion that Europe was the sending church and the rest of the world received. However, since the beginning of the third millennium this model has no longer been tenable. Ongoing secularization in the Catholic heartlands on the one hand, booming Catholic migrant communities and an influx of foreign priests in Europe on the other, blur the ideas of a 'sending' and 'receiving' church. This book seeks to do justice to the new situation as a *locus theologicus*, read the signs of the time and develop a contemporary European missiology.

Mission history

We start with two historical contributions exploring the thinking about mission in Europe in the past. Dries Vanysacker writes on the broader Impact of

La France. Pays de Mission on the changing missiological ideas of Omer Degrijse (1913-2002). The influence was first of all obvious in the preparation toward and during the sessions of Vatican II. Degrijse, at that period the superior general of a specialized Missionary Congregation — to know the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) — cooperated actively to the redaction of the decree of the Council on the missionary activities of the Church (*Ad gentes*) and was well aware of the fact that a new way of thinking about the practice of mission and missiology was needed.

The challenging and changing times continued after Vatican II: Each Congregation, and especially Missionary Congregations, had to revise its constitutions and rules on the base of the Council. For CICM the challenges were multiple and the fundamental scope of the Congregation was at stake.

After he had left the central administration of his Congregation in 1967, Degrijse continued his missiological journey. In 1967 he founded EUNTES, a center for the study, documentation and information about the Mission, and its journal *Euntes Digest*. From 1969 until 1983 he was visiting professor in missiology at the Catholic University of Leuven. Meanwhile he was appointed since 1971 as national director of the Pontifical Mission Works (1971-1986) and a member of the Council of the Propaganda Fide (1973-1983).

Degrijse, who from his youth was conscious of the needs of the changing times — continued to write articles and books on mission, missiology and evangelization. This chapter considers the evolution of his ideas between his book on Christian Humanism (*Christelijke humanisme: een levensideaal voor katholieke intellectuelen*, Roermond, 1948) and his last one on *Interreligious Dialogue: The Asian Churches set the tone* (Leuven, 1999). Although Degrijse accepted that ‘mission is everywhere’ and new evangelization among the de-Christianized people of Europe is relevant, he did not see *missio ad intra* as charisma of the specialized missionary institutes such as CICM, whose main vocation is *missio ad extra* or *missio ad gentes*.

Marek Rostkowski’s contribution deals with the missionary vocation of the laity in Europe, focusing on Heinrich Hahn (1800-1882). Heinrich Hahn is a splendid figure of a holy layman, married and father of a large family, doctor in the service to the suffering man, a committed political man for the common good and for the defence of the freedom of the Church, and above all a great promoter and backer of the Missions. With the assignment of founder of the society *Franziskus Xaverius* for Catholic missions, today Opera Pontificia

Missio, he is a model for the concept of missions, which in words and in deeds are devoted untiringly for the dissemination and defence of the faith, as well as for the apostolate, development and peace.

The Church is the universal sign of salvation and its task is to cause the Face of Christ to be revealed on its own face. It carries out this mission through its representatives and collaborators, priests, religious and lay, in order to carry to completion its redeeming action in the world. It is they to open to all humanity the paths of salvation and to spread the word and grace of God, allowing the Church to be present everywhere in the world and to gather men and women into one single people of God.

The secularity or secular dimension is closely connected with the duty of the lay to contribute to the institution, to the life and to the growth of the ecclesiastical community, remaining in union with the pastors.

The lay, therefore, carrying out such a mission, practicing their apostolate in the Church and in the world, whether in the spiritual order or in the temporal one. Although these orders are distinct, they are nevertheless tied in a unique divine design of summation in Christ of the whole world in order to give rise to a new creation at first on earth and in a perfect way to the end of time. In one and the other order, the lay who is simultaneously a member of the people of God and of the city of men must continuously be led by his unique Christian conscience.

The life and the work of Dr. Hahn are tied to the concern and missionary interest that reaches its climax above all with the founding, the guiding and the promotion of the society (1842) of the Franziskus-Xaverius-Verein, today's *Missio*, desired in tight collaboration with the Lyonnais Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi, founded in 1822 by Pauline Jaricot.

Mission theology

We continue with two theological contributions, one based in systematic theology and the other in pastoral theology. Bryan Lobo's contribution is entitled: A Faith that "breathes": A New Missionary Impetus for Europe. According to Ad Gentes no. 2 the Church is by its very nature missionary, however, not only the Church, but also the Christian Faith is by its nature missionary. It finds its origin in God and is revealed to humanity in the salvific event of Christ.

Various components of the Christian faith can transform the European mind-set. We choose two: resurrection and incarnation. There is nowadays a dualistic understanding of the human person having its remote roots in Platonic philosophy. The spiritual aspect is stressed at the expense of the bodily aspect. Therefore there is doubt about the bodily resurrection of Christ. As a consequence the resurrection of Christ is not accepted. There should not be a choice between the spirit and the body. The human person receives holistic meaningfulness because of the reality of the resurrection and it is this meaningfulness that can transform the thinking of Europeans. Meaningfulness needs a truth: the resurrection. We do not have an experience of the risen Christ, as the apostles have. If we believe, we will experience the resurrection, but our experience need not be identical to the one of the apostles.

As to the incarnation there is a misunderstanding that Incarnation is not a unique experience; it is open to everybody. There are philosophers and theologians who argue that incarnation can happen in every human being. Their perspectives are not in keeping with the orthodox perspective of the Incarnation. However, the incarnation of Jesus Christ becomes an event that reveals the divinity of humanity. In this way the Christian Faith once again has the capacity to transform human thinking today giving it a divine élan.

Paul Steffen writes about *The Pastoral Mission of the churches in Europe. Towards European contextualized models of a Pastoral of Evangelization*. Local Churches in Europe are looking for new ways to face the crisis of parishes. To live out their pastoral mission and ministry depends to a great extent on encouraging lively Christian communities where the baptized Christians are receiving formation and where they are nurtured to carry out their mission in the Church and in the secular and plural society around them.

Secularization and individualization have a great impact on Christian communities. The Christian community where most Christians are familiar with are the parishes. But their relationship with the parish has weakened since the Second Vatican Council. The parish is for the majority of Christians no binding force and a place of Christian instruction. Many people leave the Church in western countries. The institution of the parish is in crisis. A certain model of parish that belongs to a past period is gone. Pope Francis says that a parish can take very different forms. The crisis is not the end of opportunity but only the beginning.

All the Christian Churches have inherited a parish model as the dominant congregation model at the local level to nourish and live the Christian

faith of its followers. This model goes back to the time Christianity became the dominant and favored religion in the late fourth century in the Roman Empire. Charlemagne gave the parish not only a religious and spiritual function in his empire but also an educational, moral and administrative function.

The Reformation in the 16th century caused the development of typical Protestant parish and the Council of Trent had finally an impact on the typical Catholic parish.

After World War I many renewal movements were initiated in the Catholic Church in Europe, like Liturgical, Biblical, Catechetical and Youth movement. All those movements gave new ideas and life to the parishes and Christian communities. The parishes in France discovered and developed since the 1930s the social and collective dimensions of its mission. In 1943 the Mission de Paris was founded with the aim to offer to workers a non-bourgeois Christianity. Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel's book *France, pays the Mission?*, and Georges Michonneau's book *Paroisse communauté missionnaire* criticized the traditional parish and offered a new model of a Christian community able to include all social classes and to convert the parish into an outreaching community.

Vatican II was able to open with its communion ecclesiology new doors to transform the inherited clergy centred parish model into a more participative and community centered model.

The apostolic exhortations, encyclicals and many of the speeches and homilies of Pope Francis aim at promoting a more outreaching and missionary Church; a Church close to the marginalized and suffering people. For him the parish is not an outdated institution because it possesses great flexibility and can assume different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. The parish should encourage and train its members as evangelizers.

The Church is moving. God makes it possible because his Spirit gives rise to Church as a communion and gives to people spiritual gifts which they use to build communities.

Social teaching

Next there are two contributions based in Catholic social teaching and social ministry, defending human rights and freedom of Religion in the European context. Francis-Vincent Anthony reflects on New Evangelization in Dialogue

with Human Rights. The expression 'New evangelization' has acquired varied meanings in varied contexts. Taking inspiration from Pope John Paul II and the current development in the European context, new evangelization can be understood as proclaiming the gospel message in dialogue with the secular values and visions of the modern/post-modern world. Interestingly, while Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel's *La France, pays de mission?* (1943) marked the initial stage of reflection in this direction, the worldwide discussion gradually converged on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948. Since then Human Rights have become a public platform for affirming human dignity, justice and peace from the Christian perspective and in this way share with others the vision and values of the Gospel. Insofar as the young people – influenced by the current secularizing milieu – tend to become indifferent or selective in their approach to both Christian faith and Human Rights, taking up new evangelization with reference to the later may contribute to making the young better citizens and authentic Christians.

Klaus Vellguth writes on migration and freedom of religion. Looking at the lively discussions on this topic taking place in Germany, this essay is aiming to show how a society upholds the right to religious freedom and strives to implement it in daily life. None the less, in this time of migration, conflicts occur in regular intervals in Germany. These conflicts centre around the question of where the limits of religious freedom are set. Well-known conflicts, which are mentioned, are the crucifix-judgement of 1995, the discussion about the "head scarf during school lessons" (1999) and the judgement of the Federal Constitutional Court regarding the question of circumcision (2012).

An observation of the discussion within society about religious freedom in Germany is of utmost importance, because religious freedom does not thrive by theorising in a monolithic and conflict free zone. Religious freedom is much more fragile than it seems when first looking at it, and it is the fact that a society is sensitive to potential conflict areas of religious freedom, deals openly with existing conflicts and that a discussion of these questions takes place within society, that is a major indicator that a society strives to allow each individual their right to religious freedom.

Mission strategies

We conclude this book with two contributions on new forms of evangelisation, one dealing with reversed mission of foreign missionaries in Europe and the other with the use of social media in view of evangelisation. Frans Wijzen discusses the reversed mission of foreign members of missionary institutes in Europe: How do they deal with secularism? According to *Ad Gentes* the responsibility for mission is entrusted to the local church. But as mission of the Catholic, this is the world-wide Church, mission has necessarily a universal dimension. For this reason the new churches should participate in the universal mission by sending missionaries to other parts of the world (*Ad Gentes* 20). This mission started with South – South mission, and is now being supplemented with mission to Europe.

Between the 1st World War and the Second Vatican Council missionary institutes in the Netherlands sent an overwhelming number of missionaries to the mission territories. Since the beginning of the 21st century mission has been reversed. Missionary institutes receive an increasing number of ‘new’ missionaries to work in the Netherlands. Most of these are working in parishes, work among Catholic migrant communities or among believers of other faiths. None of the international religious institutes focus on what usually is seen as the ‘core business’ of these institutes, the *missio ad gentes*. The question that is addressed is: How do foreign missionaries deal with secularism, with those who have no faith or are against faith?

Wojciech Kluj deals with the proclamation of the Gospel on new “digital” continent. The missionary has to be able to adjust to every new reality. Pope John Paul II spoke about new Areopagus of missions and the first among them was “the world of communications” (*Redemptoris Missio* 37c). He coined also an expression of the “new evangelization” (new in its ardor, methods and expression). Pope Benedict XVI used to say about new “digital continent”, which should be evangelized. Also Pope Francis shows new media as practical tool that can help in communicating the Gospel (especially Tweeter). A biblical starting point could be the story from the Acts of the Apostles (16:9-10), when Paul planning his further activities had a vision of a Macedonian pleading ‘Come across to ... help us.’ The new digital world should not be left unevangelized. We are still new in this reality. The new “digital Natives” will need new kind of missionaries and new vision of “digital religion”. Using studies of

theologians and secular scholars on Religious websites, applications, networks as well as use of portable phones, the article summarizes the actual theological reflection on it.

We hope that the present volume will stimulate discussion and reflection on mission in Europe and Europe as a mission continent as implication of the 'mission in six continents' and 'mutual missionary assistance of churches' models of mission, that have entered missiological thinking since the end of the Second World War and subsequent de-colonization process. According to the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the Church is everywhere, but primarily in the own country.

A specialized Mission Institute, the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), and its answer(s) on changing concepts and realities of mission between 1965 and 1988

DRIES VANYSACKER

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Introduction

In this contribution we want to study the answers of a specialized Mission Institute, the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), also known as the Missionaries of Scheut, to the challenges of changing concepts of mission and the changing contemporary mission reality between 1965 and 1988. We will concentrate especially on the struggling CICM had with what the book *La France. Pays de Mission* (Paris: Spes 1943) of the French theologians Henri Godin and Yves Daniel already announced in 1943, to know the end of the monopoly of the West as the leading Christian center of the overseas mission *ad extra* and the start of New Evangelization and of the West being itself a receiving mission territory.

CICM had been founded in Belgium in 1862 and its first experimental Constitutions of 1862 and 1886 were definitively approved by the Holy See in 1900: CICM was a missionary congregation that send its members *ad extra* to convert “pagan” people to Christianity. After a start in China (1865), CICM went also to Congo (1888), the Philippines (1907), the USA (1919) and the Netherlands East Indies (1937). After the Second World War, CICM engaged

in new mission territories, as Japan (1947), Haïti (1953), Guatemala (1955), the Dominican Republic (1958), and Brazil (1963). In the timespan of our study, we have to mention also the starting up of the CICM-missions after Vatican II, in Cameroon (1966), Zambia (1976), Senegal (1976) and Nigeria (1979).¹

Besides some minor changes, especially in 1957, the original Constitutions remained the same until 1967. It is clear that the Council of Vatican II (1962-1965) was a point of no return in a changing conception of how mission should be understood. We will follow the answers of CICM as an Institute and of some of its members (Omer Degrijse and Léon Fosty) until the approval by Rome of the new Constitutions in 1988. This journey is structured in 4 stages and to do so, we use several unedited archival sources and published articles and books.

Omer Degrijse and his Role during Vatican II and the redaction of the Decree *Ad Gentes* (1962-1965)

Paul VI's proclamation on 7 December 1965 of *Ad Gentes*, the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the missionary activities of the Church, introduced a whole new way of thinking about the practice of mission and about missiology, about the link between mission and ecumenism and about the attitude towards non-Christian religions and cultures. The decree on the mission posed anything but an easy challenge. It was a compromise text that needed a long preparation and its redaction was a struggle until the very last day. Within the text there is an obvious distinction between "mission" (in singular) and "missions" (in plural). The first refers primarily to the *missio Dei* (God's mission), that is, the divine intervention in favor of all humanity of all times and off the whole world (AG 2). *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people. The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the Church's life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world. The Council emphasized the Church's "missionary nature", basing it in a dynamic way on the Trinitarian mission itself. The word "missions" (*missiones ecclesiae*, the missionary ventures of the church) refers to "those undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel are sent by the

¹ D. Verhelst, N. Pycke (eds.), *C.I.C.M. Missionaries, Past and Present 1862-1987. History of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Scheut / Missionhurst)*, Leuven 1995.

church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching and planting the church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ ... The special purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization and the planting of the church among those peoples and groups where she has not yet taken root” (AG 6). The conciliar decree adds that “all over the world indigenous particular churches ought to grow from seeds of the word of God, churches which would be adequately organized and would possess their own proper strength and maturity. With their own hierarchy and faithful, and sufficiently endowed with means adapted to the full Christian life, they should contribute to the good of the whole church” (AG 6). It is within this double definition and purpose of mission that the council presents a broader meaning of the term “evangelization”: “Evangelization is that activity through which, in obedience to Christ’s command and moved by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, the church makes itself fully present to all persons and peoples in order to lead them to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ by example of its life and teaching, and also by the sacraments and other means of grace” (AG 5). This new theology of mission applies universally to all the churches, even while not denying their differences (AG 6). The bottom line in the conciliar mission theology is the emphasis on cultural diversity in the church and the role of local churches (in communion with the universal church-family) in the work of evangelization and implanting of the church in their various contexts. This is reciprocity. The importance of the Vatican II theology of mission — not only expressed in *Ad gentes*, but also in *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Nostra Aetate* — lays particularly in the openness towards other religions and cultures, in an ecumenical attitude and in the rediscovery of the local churches as the primary agent of mission.

This awareness has led to a fundamentally new interpretation of the purpose of mission and the role of missionaries and mission agencies. The council affirms that in the midst of these new circumstances and relationships there is still need for formation of experts or, rather, trained missionaries. But the missionaries are to recognize that their task pertains to the whole church, and they are to appreciate that they are sent as ambassadors of one local church to another local church (where such a local church already exists), as witnesses of solidarity and partnership, and as expressions of mutual encounter, exchange, and enrichment (AG 26).²

² D. Vanysacker, *Paradigm Shifts in the Evolution of the Catholic Theology of Mission*, “Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life” 8 (2017) no. 1-2, p. 37-41.

The context was clear: traditional missions had been deeply affected by the consequences of a worldwide decolonization. An internal reform was needed that would emphasize the role of the young churches with their own hierarchies. Moreover, we need to bear in mind that the attitude towards the missionaries was rather less than positive, both in the West and in the countries where the missionaries operated. On the contrary, traditional missionaries were put in a bad light because of their ties to the colonizers, and many were not just targeted in the media, some also suffered during the revolts that erupted, particularly during the dramatic Simba rebellion (1964-1966) in the former Belgian Congo.³

At that very moment, Omer Degrijse (1913-2002) was as the superior general of CICM, a pre-eminently missionary congregation, very much involved in Vatican II with the redaction of the Mission decree. From the various sources he has left behind, spread over his personal archives, and from his interventions in several sessions of Vatican II, we can reconstruct his contribution to what would eventually become *Ad Gentes*.⁴ The leitmotiv in Degrijse's texts and interventions is an apologetic of the mission institutes, which he believed not only had to open up to changes in the field and new ideas about mission, but should also be prepared to cooperate with the young churches and the local hierarchy. In that respect, Degrijse pushed ahead, even though on other occasions, he tended to be rather obstructionist. His main themes are a clear description of the essential — territorial! — concept of mission *ad extra*, the importance of specialized mission institutes, the missionary duty of foreign and native clergy and lay people, ecumenism in the missions, the active involvement of lay people and the dialogue with the ever-growing number of non-Christians. His rather positive attitude toward the Propaganda Fide, still a guiding factor in the organization of the missions, remained a constant during the editing process of the scheme on mission activity.⁵

³ D. Vanysacker, *Les martyrs oubliés? Les missionnaires dans la tempête de la rébellion des Simbas au Congo en 1964-1966*, Turnhout 2016.

⁴ See Leuven, KADOC, Archives Omer Degrijse (BE/942855/446); Leuven, Maurits Sabbe Library, Archives Vaticanum II, Archives Omer Degrijse (Box 10).

⁵ D. Vanysacker, *Specialiseren en samenwerken om te overleven. Omer Degrijse en zijn apologie voor missie-instituten tijdens het Tweede Vaticaans Concilie*, "Tijdschrift voor theologie" 56 (2016) no. 1, p. 34-50.

Léon Fosty on the changing Concepts of Mission and the specificity of CICM (1966)

Immediately after Vatican II, the Holy See asked all religious institutes to review their constitutions and rules on the basis of the renewal brought about by the Council. According to the Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae sanctae* of Pope Paul VI (6 August 1966), every institute had to call a general chapter together within two, or at the most three years, in conformity with the Norms for the implementation of the decree *Perfectae caritatis*.⁶ These constitutions could be tried out until the next ordinary general chapter, which has the authority to extend these constitutions, but not longer than the next, following chapter. CICM decides to hold a chapter in 1967, and according to the timetable, her constitutions should be ratified during the general chapter of 1981. By a special permission from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (the former Propaganda Fide), CICM finally could postpone the definite approval of the constitutions until the general chapter of 1987. Thus, the period of experimentation lasted twenty years (1967-1987), with general chapters organized in 1967, 1974, 1981 and 1987; while the period 1981-1987 led to the writing of a final version of the constitutions that were approved by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples on 31 May 1988.⁷

For CICM the challenges were multiple and the fundamental scope of the congregation was at stake. As preparation of the coming general chapter of 1967, Father Léon Fosty (1913-1981), assistant general of the general CICM council, was asked in May, 1966 by Degrijse to study the object of the missionary activities in *Ad Gentes* and to enlighten in that context the principles of the CICM missionary actions and to actualize a document on the specific goals of the congregation.

In his study on *Ad Gentes*, Fosty underlined that the missionary activity was considered as a special activity within the broader aim of the expansion of

⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19660806_ecclesiae-sanctae.html (01.08.2018).

⁷ N. Pycke, *Aggiornamento and Internationalization, 1967-1987*, in: D. Verhelst, N. Pycke (eds.), *C.I.C.M. Missionaries, Past and Present 1862-1987. History of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Scheut / Missionhurst)*, Leuven 1995, p. 417-418.

the Church.⁸ The goal of missionary endeavor was the evangelization and the plantation of the Church. According to the CICM father, *Ad Gentes* did take some distance from a too territorial concept of the missions, since it concentrated on peoples and human communities. The difference between the specificity of missionary activities towards “gentes” and the pastoral activities towards the “fideles” and the ecumenical activities “ad unitatem christianorum” was clear.

Fosty especially stressed the fact that during the redaction of the text there had been two tendencies. Besides a majority group of fathers that preferred a strict interpretation of missionary activities, to know the activities among people and human groups that not yet believed in Christ, there was a small group of supporters of an extended notion of mission that stated that the mission was everywhere, since “pagans” were everywhere. According to them there were among the so-called Christians a lot of dechristianized people that were in fact “pagans”. This group of theologians stated that there was no distinction anymore needed between Christian peoples and non-Christians; nor between the exterior and the interior of the Church; that the interior mission had since long joined the exterior mission; that the consequences of the dechristianization are such that one had to speak of a new evangelization; that it had no sense anymore to leave Europe to go to the “pagans”, since Christianity was everywhere a minority and in diaspora. Fosty quoted Archbishop Fulton Sheen (“The Missions of the Church are not in Asia and in Africa only: they are in New York, Chicago, Boston, London, Paris”), Henri Godin and Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard (“La France est un pays de mission”) as the souls of that minority group. The CICM assistant general was very clear about this option:

An established Church that exercises an activity of evangelization by herself, for instance by shock troops as the priests of the Mission of France, toward pagan or paganized population groups, has no need to do it with foreign aid and cannot be considered as a mission territory in the strict sense, especially not if that particular Church is contextualized within a frame of episcopal collegiality of a country or a region.⁹

⁸ L. Fosty, *L'objet de l'activitas missionalis dans “Ad Gentes”*, dd. 31-5-1966 (Leuven, Kadoc, Archives Omer Degrijse, BE/942855/446, Box 12).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

His conclusion was that the ideal missionary activity for CICM would be always the extension of the Church by planting it within new peoples. The help toward young churches came at the second place; while the assistance towards churches that were not well established or that were in a state of regression or weakness, was already at the limit of the congregation's specificity. The helping of human groups that lived outside the Church while being situated in a fully established Church, the so-called new evangelization, was according to him, not a task for a specific missionary institute as CICM. Opening that door would endanger the congregation.

In a second contribution the assistant general elaborates the specific goals of CICM and stresses again the dos and the don'ts of the congregation.¹⁰ First of all, Fosty states that the insertion of the words "Ecclesiam stabiliendam" in the description of the scope of the congregation during the general chapter of 1957 totally fits in the new missionary situation after the Second World War. The missionaries not only left for "pagan" countries to convert them and to exercise the apostolate as auxiliary forces of the local clergy until the day that Church is strongly established, but they also went to overseas Christian regions where the situation was not stable, where the Church was in danger and where a process of dechristianization was happening. In the specific case of CICM the missions to the Philippines and those recent to Latin America — Haïti (1953), Guatemala (1955), the Dominican Republic (1958), and Brazil (1963) — had to be seen in that light.

Nevertheless, according to Fosty, that did not mean that CICM had to involve with an apostolate called 'Interior Missions' within Europe that concentrated on the rise of regions, sociological groups, dioceses in a state of spiritual distress, an apostolate typical of the "Mission de France", "Missions de campagnes" etc. The assistant general of CICM thought that such an extension of goals would endanger the exclusive missionary character of the congregation and insisted that "such a deviation would be extremely harmful for the spirit and for the recruitment". Fosty stated that in the contrary case there would not exist anymore any difference between a congregation as CICM and an organization such as "Mission de France" that already at that time had activities outside France, while the official Roman documents concerning the

¹⁰ L. Fosty, *Scheut: Son but spécifique: Les missions*, dd. 15 May 1966 (Leuven, Kadoc, Archives Omer Degrijse, BE/942855/446, Box 12).

“Mission de France” mentioned several times that this organism effected “opera quasi-missionalia”. Fosty commented a possible transfer within CICM to such quasi-missionary activities within Europe, with the passage in Matthew 5,13: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for.”

Aggiornamento and Internationalization: the General Chapters of CICM from 1967 up to the Constitutions of 1988 (1967-1988)

Thanks to a very interesting overview written by CICM father Nestor Pycke in 1995, we are able to follow the answers given by the general chapters of the Mission Congregation from 1967 up to the new constitutions of 1988 on the ever changing contemporary reality of mission and evangelization.¹¹

Although the Mission Decree *Ad Gentes* gave the Young Churches a place, and declared that the entire Church was missionary and that evangelization was a fundamental duty of the people of God and each particular Church under the guidance of its bishop, the tone still was typical Western and paternalistic with a central role for specialized mission congregations and institutes. Nevertheless, these mission institutes would have to cope with challenges. The decennium after Vatican II showed a drastic decrease of their membership of Western missionaries and had to decide to fully internationalize or to unplug.

At the same time the Roman Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples (the updated Propaganda Fide) published on 24 February 1969 the *Instructio Relationes in territoriis missionum*, which officially abolished the age old *ius commissionis* (the practice whereby each newly created mission or circumscription was entrusted to the care and jurisdiction of a specific missionary institute).¹² This meant that the task of the missionary institutes from that very moment was really seen as a service to the particular Churches,

¹¹ N. Pycke, op. cit., p. 417-490.

¹² E. Pecorario, *Relationes in territoriis missionum inter ordinarios locorum et instituta missionalia juxta instructionem diei 24 februarii 1969* (Bibliotheca Monior ecclesiasticus, vol. 30), Naples 1970.

which were autonomous hierarchical entities, presided by their own hierarchy. This evolution would deepen itself with the Bishop Synod of 1974 gathered around the theme “Evangelization within the contemporary world”¹³ and the successive Exhortation by Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 8 December 1975, that made the typical distinction of *Ad gentes* between the young and old churches entirely disappear. *Evangelii nuntiandi* repeated the inculturation question and stressed the need to be sensitive to the indigenous culture of those being evangelized.¹⁴

As Pycke states, “For a missionary institute, such as C.I.C.M., the question comes up: what is its place within the Church, and what is its task?”¹⁵ The chapter of 1967 and the provisional constitutions of 1968 were not very clear. It was stated that the congregation *preferably* directs its missionary activity to the nations and groups of people who do not yet believe in Christ. It was underlined that CICM was a missionary institute and that its apostolate among the nations and the non-Christians was the *raison d’être* of CICM. Within the constitutions there were 108 references or quotations from documents of Vatican II: 55 refer to the decree *Ad gentes* about missionary activity; 14 to *Lumen gentium*; 20 to *Perfectae caritatis*; 15 to *Presbyterorum ordinis*; and another 18 references to seven other conciliar documents.¹⁶ But this statement and the various references to *Ad Gentes* raised a lot of questions regarding the nature and the purpose of the congregation. During a general conference in Rome in 1971, the remark was raised that this *preference* had been reduced or diminished. The history of CICM could be divided in two periods, to know before and after World War II. Before the war, Scheut’s orientation was uniquely *ad gentes*, coinciding perfectly with the mission *ad extra*. After the war, this preference given to missionary work among the nations is diminishing or decreasing in the congregation. This process of searching would go on until the chapter of 1987.

¹³ On that Synod, see among others, J.M. Connors SVD, *Synod ’74: Success or Failure? (November 30, 1974)*: <http://www.churchauthority.org/resources2/connorsynod74.asp> (06.02.2017).

¹⁴ See http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (06.02.2017).

¹⁵ N. Pycke, op. cit., p. 488.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 422.

In 1974, partly under the influence of the preferential option for the poor by the Latin-American synod of bishops of Medellín in 1968, the goal of the congregation was widened to apostolate among the non-Christians and the poor. This affirmation of a double priority would become the cause of some inner tension, which remained during the following years.

The chapter of 1987 went back to the one original goal of the congregation: “We leave our country to proclaim salvation as the great gift of God” (Constitutions, 1988, Article 2). According to Pycke there is a shift in the meaning of “ad extra”:

Before, and still in 1967, it was understood in the traditional sense — to go from the so-called “Christian” West to the mission countries. C.I.C.M. had this type of *ad extra* in common with other exclusively missionary institutes. But already in 1967, an evolution towards a new interpretation of *ad extra*, is noticeable. The C.I.C.M. members from the missions were actually *ad extra*; they were not allowed to stay in their country of origin, but they had to be willing to go to “foreign countries”. Another element is added later, namely, the perception that mission is everywhere. From that time onwards the old interpretation of *ad extra* is no longer valid. What had been asked in 1967 from all members originating from the missions is asked from all members in 1974 — to be ready to leave the country of origin. In 1987, the debatable term “to be ready” is dropped and replaced by “We leave our country”. The geographical element that C.I.C.M. has always seen in *ad extra* is preserved... / ...The *ad extra* orientation means more than just going to a foreign country. It is an expression of a missionary attitude, asking the members to be ready to fulfill specific missionary tasks. It supposes availability, mobility and courage to never settle in one place. It is a question of “giving up everything for Jesus Christ,” as Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians (3,8) ..!... *Ad extra* is the clear sign of this “giving up everything” to follow Christ, to integrate in another people and to live in solidarity. *Ad extra* is therefore at the heart of the C.I.C.M. spirituality. “To leave our country” supposes a good deal of

self-denial. This provides C.I.C.M. members with a greater inner freedom, so they can devote themselves totally to the evangelical witness of the brotherhood and the solidarity among the particular Churches in their universal mission (cf Const. 1988, Art. 2).¹⁷

The aim of this change was not to drop the priority of the poor. The option for the poor was understood as an integral part of every apostolic work, also of evangelization. The chapter of 1987 underlined that it this option had to be done after the example of Jesus, who addressed himself preferentially to the poor as the privileged recipients of the Kingdom of God. It is interesting to note that the constitutions of 1988 contain not a single reference to the documents of Vatican II.¹⁸

Another very important choice was the internationalization of the Congregation. After a first wave in 1953-1958, a second wave of 1981-1987 stated that the crisis of the late sixties and seventies badly had affected the congregation. Especially the European provinces had no vocations any more. Therefore C.I.C.M. was called to take the road of an internal universal brotherhood, to a deep integration in the people of the countries where C.I.C.M. members were sent to live there as brothers, and to put this universal brotherhood into practice within their own ranks in international communities. The future of the congregation was not necessarily situated in Europe, was already stated at the chapter of 1974, but in Africa, Asia and Latin-America.

The chapter of 1981 introduced in this context a revolutionary project within C.I.C.M. when it announced that Europe was recognized as a truly mission region, and paved the way to the possibility to open up for international teams.¹⁹ This meant for C.I.C.M. that the original sending or base provinces, North and South Belgium and the Netherlands, were now also receiving or mission provinces. Other provinces within C.I.C.M. (in the Philippines, Zaire and the United States) already had this status. This radical change was not easy, as Pycke states:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 469.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 480, 488-489.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 470-472.

The C.I.C.M. missionaries who live and work in Europe have to be aware of the mission situation of their continent, and they should no longer believe that the missions are only beyond the sea. This asks for a complete change in mentality. According to a report of the regional meeting of the C.I.C.M. Major Superiors in Belgium and the Netherlands — a meeting at Zuun on the 1st and 2nd of March 1989 — there are still many missionaries for whom Europe is still not a mission region; some of them are willing to accept Europe as mission region only because of the presence in Europe of foreigners coming from the Third World. Although the change in mentality among the C.I.C.M. members is slow because of a contrary tradition and of the ageing of the group, there are indications of a real change.²⁰

In any case, the vitality of the European provinces depended on the efforts of each of their members to make their respective provinces really missionary provinces. The North Belgian province answered positively and presented in February 1986 the first international CICM team of three missionaries (a Belgian, a Filipino and a Zairean) in the town parish of Saint Anthony in Antwerp. While presenting the team to the parish community, the vicar general of the diocese emphasized the fact that this was a matter of exchange between Churches. He explained that, just as priests of this Church go to the Third World Churches to spread the faith, priests from the Third World come here to witness to their faith together with us. It was considered as a rich source of inspiration for the people here and for the people over there, and had nothing to do with a possible shortage of priests in this or that country. It was a matter of giving shape to the communion of the Churches and to the universal brotherhood among equal Churches.

It is clear that CICM, like other missionary congregations, from that moment on sent missionaries to Europe. Europe, once the subject of mission, has become also object of mission. Mission is no longer a Western one-way enterprise, it is carried out more and more from everywhere to everywhere. One could call it missionary exchange or reverse mission.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 471.

Omer Degrijse's position toward New Evangelization of Europe (1988)

In the context of the opening up by CICM for Europe as a possible mission continent, Omer Degrijse, former Superior general of CICM wrote in 1988 a book in Dutch on the New Evangelization of Europe: *Why and How?*²¹

At that moment the seventy five year old Degrijse was still an influential missiologist. After he had left the central administration of his congregation in 1967, he founded Euntes, a center for the study, documentation and information about the Mission, and its journal *Euntes Digest*. From 1969 until 1983 he was visiting professor in missiology at the Catholic University of Leuven. Meanwhile he was appointed since 1971 as national director of the Pontifical Mission Works (1971-1986) and a member of the Council of the Propaganda Fide (1973-1983). Degrijse — who from his youth was conscious of the needs of the changing times — continued to write articles and books on mission, missiology and evangelization.

His 1988 publication, *De nieuwe evangelisatie van Europa*, consisted of three chapters. In chapter 1: “Europe a dechristianized Continent” (pages 25-56), Degrijse analyses why in his contemporary days one was talking that much of a new evangelization of the Western World. According to him it was a sign that everyone was convinced that the Christian faith and the faith experience were strongly affected. The CICM-father states that already quite a time ago one had started to consider Europe and North-America as mission territories and to declare that there was worldwide a mission situation. He points to the publication *France, pays de Mission* by Godin and Daniel in 1943 that caused a shock in France. The thought that certain groups of people or some regions of France lived in a mission situation gradually spread. Some theologians launched theories on missionary methods and missionary pastoral. But Degrijse adds that the French example was for the time being not followed. Still according to the author, the next step was taken in the 1963 conference in Mexico City of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches that accepted the slogan “Witness in Six Continents”. Later on, also in the Catholic world, by the influences of religious sociological research in the Western world, by the doctrines of the Second Vatican Council

²¹ O. Degrijse, *De nieuwe evangelisatie van Europa: waarom? Hoe?*, Brugge 1988.

and especially by the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 8 December 1975 of Pope Paul VI, the notion “that Mission was everywhere” gradually had become commonplace. Degrijse underscores that it is only very recently that one became aware of the process of secularization of the Western world and of the need of an urgent approach of a re-evangelization of Europe.²²

In a second chapter, “Sign of Hope” (pages 57-80), the CICM father states that the new evangelization of Europe should be inspired by the evangelization of the Young Churches and the Third World. In this context he talks about the new movements in Belgium and elsewhere in the Western world.

In a third and largest chapter, “Hints for a new evangelization” (pages 81-176), Degrijse outlines on the basis of his theological and pastoral insights several possible pastoral activities within this new evangelization. The four most important power lines are: 1) the new evangelization has to become the task of the whole Church, of all the Church members and not only of the elite; 2) without the full engagement of the lay (family, women, youth), the new evangelization is doomed to fail; 3) to realize the full engagement of the lay one had to form basic communities on the level of the parishes; and 4) a popular Church supposes liturgy, catechesis and religiousness at the level of the people.

In that same chapter, the former superior general of CICM touches also the theme “a missionary Europe”.²³ First of all he notes that until recent times Belgium was part of the top world missionary countries and he supposes that this missionary spirit did not die. Contrary to an abundant literature on new evangelization, the traditional mission “ad gentes” and “ad extra”, seems to be absent from the latest bibliography. According to Degrijse this was a regrettable mistake, since Europe could not afford itself to be only self-evangelizing. Moreover this would be a denial of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council and its decree on mission, according to which on the one hand the whole Church is missionary (AG 35) and the totality of the People God’s has a missionary duty (LG 17, AG 36, EN 4 and 59); and on the other hand each particular Church is made according to the image of the universal Church (LG 23, CD 11, AG 38). This implies for the author that the Churches of the Third World, even the poorest, have to collaborate to the universal evangelization and mission. Degrijse is very happy with the change in Latin America since

²² Ibid., p. 25.

²³ Ibid., p. 165-168.

the CELAM (Episcopal Conference of Latin America)-Conference of Puebla in 1979 and the International Mission Conference of Bogota (the Congreso Misionero Latinoamericano III) in July 1987, where the slogan of Puebla was realized: “Finally the time has come for Latin America to intensify works of mutual service between local churches and to extend them beyond their own frontiers ad gentes. True we ourselves are in need of missionaries but we must give from our own poverty” (Puebla 368).²⁴

Also Europe had to follow that example according to the CICM father who remind the reader to the sayings of the Popes who repeated that a country that was generous to cede pastoral collaborators to poor mission churches would be blessed with increasing vocations. Degrijse concludes by giving some hints for the revival of an European mission “ad gentes” and “ad extra”: it started within Europe, for instance, by evangelization of the non-Christian immigrants; cooperation to the universal mission means also that the Churches of Europe influence the public opinion, the governments and the institutions to improve the North-South relationship, to promote more justice within the world trade and to counter the arms trade.

That leads Degrijse to the theme of “deploying missionaries”, where he is very clear on the role of missionaries in the new evangelization of Europe.²⁵ According to him the mission situation in Europe differs totally from the mission situation in the Third World and thus needs a different methodology of evangelization. The exclusive missionary institutes of European origin working for the mission “ad gentes” and “ad extra” that wonder if they should extend their scope and collaborate with the re-evangelization of their continent should stick to their original vocation. There are more “gentes” than ever in the Third World, especially in Asia, and the danger that they will be forgotten if the missionary institutes redirect their attention and activities to the re-evangelization of their own European people is more than realistic. Moreover by overstressing the importance of the new evangelization, Europe overlooks the ever increasing group of non-Christians living in Europe: Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu guest workers, foreign students, immigrants and refugees. According to Degrijse in his days Western-Europe counted sixteen to seventeen million

²⁴ S. Escobar, *Latin America*, in: J.M. Phillips, R.T. Coote (eds.), *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission. Essays in honor of Gerald H. Anderson*, Grand Rapids 1993, p. 132.

²⁵ O. Degrijse, op. cit., p. 168-170.

Muslims and in France there were more and more conversions to Islam. That the evangelical dialogue with these mass non-Christians was almost totally disregarded does not surprise the author. Diocesan priests and other pastoral workers were not able to cope with such specialized apostolate, since it was missionary work typical of the specialized and exclusive missionary institutes. Their members were able to work during years in the regions where Muslims, Buddhist and Hindu came from, they could study their languages, their culture and their religion. The evangelization of the dechristianized European population, yes this was a matter of the local pastoral workers who had the best preparation to do it.

Finally, Degrijse hints at another possible service that the exclusive missionary institutes could render to their home Church: the constant reminding of her duty on the level of mission “ad extra” and her participation at the universal evangelization.

Conclusion

The answers of a CICM, an exclusively missionary Institute, to the challenges of changing concepts of mission and the changing contemporary mission reality between 1965 and 1988 could be summarized as a constant updating of the “ad extra” and “ad gentes” concepts, both essential elements of the identity, the spirit and the soul of the congregation.

Whereas individual members as Omer Degrijse en Léon Fosty were very aware of the ever changing world missionaries were living in, they seem to have been both very clear in their rejecting of a possible engagement of CICM in the re-evangelization of a dechristianized Europe as suggested by Godin and Daniel and followed up by the new evangelization. In their eyes, this kind of pastoral activities were not the scope of a specialized missionary institute.

It is true that Degrijse was a genuine supporter of the necessary renewals within the mission activities in the light of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council. The assisting of the Young Churches, the stabilizing of overseas Christianities in difficulties or danger, the interactive collaboration between the particular Churches and the Universal Church, and in 1988 the potential evangelizing or dialogue with the increasing non-Christian immigrants in Europe demonstrate his openness. In that sense, he was very in line with the general view of the CICM congregation, to know a developing interpretation

of the concept “ad extra”, but always with a principal choice for the soul and spirit of the congregation: “to leave our country”.

But concerning the interpretation of the concept “ad gentes” Degrijse was less compliant. When the congregation recognized in 1981 Europe as a genuine mission region, with the potentiality of starting up international teams, the road for a collaboration by CICM to the re-evangelization of Europe was paved. In his book of 1988 he clearly rejects — as he always had done — the engagement of exclusively missionary institutes for the re-evangelization of dechristianized peoples or regions in Europe. Such pastoral responsibilities in his eyes did not resort under the tasks of CICM members, even not for international teams of his congregation. The 1986 Antwerp experiment was for Degrijse a thorn in the eye. CICM had to evangelize “gentes”, especially outside Europe and in Europe the real “gentes” were the non-Christian groups of Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus. In this interpretation, and only in this interpretation, Europe could be a possible mission continent for his and other specialized Mission Institutes.

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Heinrich Hahn – Holy Forerunner of Missionary Cooperation in Europe

MAREK ROSTKOWSKI, OMI

Introduction

God has His steady plan of salvation concerning man and the world, which was revealed in the Word Incarnate, His Son Jesus Christ, through whom God communicated to men in a full and definitive way (cf. Hbr 1:1-2). Now the redeeming mission of Christ continues in the world through the medium of the Church, bearer of the evangelical message of its Teacher.

The Church is the universal sign of salvation,¹ its task is to make manifest on its own face the face of Christ. This mission is carried out through sending its representatives and aides, priests, the religious and the lay, into the world where they carry to completion His redeeming action. They are the ones who open to all humanity the paths to salvation and spread the word and grace of God, allowing the Church to become present everywhere in the world and to gather human beings into one sole people of God. All the faithful participate in the mission of the Church, with a diversity of ministries, functions and services for the common good and for the usefulness of its entire body, by being their active members.² The Christian as an individual is in a horizontal relationship with the other members of the same people of God, of the one body of Christ, of the same temple of the Spirit. One can affirm that the discourse on the lay mission finds its foundation and its field of development in the individualisation of the role of the layman in the world and in the Church.

¹ Cf. LG 49; AG 1.

² Cf. AA 2.

On the basis of the unity of the people of God, of the common affiliation with Christ and His mission, the lay are jointly responsible for that same redeeming mission for which they must work tirelessly. The mission of the Church, and thus that of the lay, has as goal the salvation of mankind and therefore it is the duty of every believer to announce Christ to the world with the word and the works, as the Church's Teaching stresses.³ To speak of the participation of the lay in the mission of the Church does not mean to affirm that the lay participate in the mission of the clergy and the religious, that is, the Church, but they "are they themselves the Church", this means that the mission of the lay is the mission of the Church.

The Code of Canon Law of 1983, before speaking of the legal status of each group of persons inside the Church, deals with the people of God, a concept in which it is understood to include all the faithful. Among these, the faithful lay people are an integral and inseparable part of the people of God because, through baptism, they acquire true equality in dignity and action. They are incorporated into the Church of Christ and in it they form a legal person with their own duties and rights, and allowed at the same time to share in the priestly, prophetic and regal function of Christ, according to the condition and duties fitting to each, to the end of completing the mission that God has entrusted to the Church.

Chapter VII of the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* begins by saying that "members of the Church, as provided by baptism, all Christians are jointly responsible for missionary activity" and that "the participation of the community and of individual faithful in this right-duty is called «missionary cooperation»".⁴ This cooperation is the contribution that each faithful, as member of the Church, must bear to it so that it can fully answer to its divine purpose, that is to say, to expand and extend itself to all the peoples in order to let them share in the Redemption. In other words, the cooperation presupposes the commitment of all and of every single member in order to reach the common objective because all members are called to commit themselves according to their own capacity to help and cooperate in the missionary activity of the Church. As St John Chrysostom wrote, "I cannot believe that someone can arrive at his

³ AA 6; RM 3.

⁴ RM 77.

own salvation without ever seeing to the salvation of his neighbour.⁵” Heinrich Hahn also had these same words in his heart fifteen centuries later.

The Church and the apostolate have as sole aim that of carrying to the limits of space and time all mankind to the salvation gained in Jesus Christ. In one Church completely missionary, where the evangelical work is presented as a fundamental duty of the people of God,⁶ a particular role lies within the jurisdiction of the lay. They are in fact specifically responsible for Christian and evangelical initiatives, already active and present in the reality of life.⁷ Missionary cooperation, in a narrow sense, finds expression as the sum of works, associations and initiatives oriented to awakening the missionary spirit of the believers and to transforming it into effective help to the mission *ad gentes*, through prayer, sacrifice, support to the vocations, to charity, etc.

Y. Congar in 1948⁸ described the layman besides as a member of the people of God praying also as a witness who acts, gains and organises just like the people of God. The secularity or secular dimension is narrowly connected with the duty of the lay to contribute towards the institution, the life and growth of the ecclesiastical community, remaining in union with the pastors.

The lay, therefore, carrying out such a mission, exercise their apostolate in the Church and in the world, be it in the spiritual order or in the temporal. Although these orders are distinct, nevertheless they are linked in a sole divine design of summing up in Christ the whole world in order to give rise to a new creation at first on earth and in a perfect way to the end of time. In one and the other order, the layman who is simultaneously member of the people of God and of the city of mankind must continually be his own guide with his Christian conscience.

We find ourselves before a man devoted, lay, exemplary husband and father of a family, forerunner of the missionary cooperation in Germany, scientist, doctor and politician faithful to the Church, on top of being a benefactor of the poor, of the suffering and of the needy of every type, filled with an intense spirituality suited “to building with his political and administrative commitment the *civitas terrena*, holding constantly present the *civitas Dei* in all his conduct”.

⁵ Giovanni Crisostomo, *De sacerdotio* 6,10; PG 48,686.

⁶ Cf. AG 35.

⁷ Cf. EN 70.

⁸ *Pour une théologie du laïcité*, “Études” 256 (1948) no. 42-54, p. 194-218.

A historical portrait – papal teaching in the 19th century

From the Council of Trent to the Vatican Ecumenical Council I one cannot speak in a narrow sense of the existence of a “Catholic laity” but in truth one must speak of its slow preparation in order to place the conditions for its active presence in the apostolate. In the centuries, the apostolate of the lay, from the medieval model, directed principally to exclusively religious ends (of prayer, charity, and counselling) with the spirituality adopted from that of the monks and friars, began to clarify itself in ever new forms. The new direction pursued new trends always more forceful in Christianisation and, with the progressive maturation of the conscience of a “laity” understood as an organic and specific field of function, entered into the life itself of the Church.

In this respect, in the nineteenth century there are few references and documentary records to be mentioned. In them the importance of the apostolate of prayer and of sacrifice is underscored. Gregory XVI in the encyclical *Commisum divinitus* made reference unequivocally to the division of Christians in two categories: one made up of those who have the duty to preside over and to order, the clergy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the other of those who are subjects and must obey, the people of the faithful. It recalls the words of Emperor Basilius in the eighth council according to which it was permitted in no way to the lay the dealing with ecclesiastical questions such as investigation and research, in this field, being such specificities reserved to the clergy having the office to manage and “to sanctify, to bind and to release” with authority.⁹

In 1840, in the encyclical letter *Probe Nostis*¹⁰, the Pontiff made reference to the Society for the “Propagation of the Faith” founded in 1822 in Lyon, which sustained itself, expanded, and grew with modest offerings and daily prayers addressed to God by the members. This work, geared to sustain the apostolic workers and to practise the works of Christian charity towards neophytes, was considered by the Pope “most worthy of admiration and of love by all the good people”.¹¹

⁹ Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Commisum divinitus* (17.05.1835), in: *Acta Gregorii Pp. XVI*, II, Roma, 1901, p. 33.

¹⁰ Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Probe Nostis de Fide propaganda* (15.08.1840), in: *Acta Gregorii Pp. XVI*, III, Roma 1902, p. 83-86.

¹¹ *Enchiridion delle encicliche*, Bologna, 1994-, II, n. 79. Cf P. Chiochetta, *Chiese locali e cooperazione tra le Chiese sotto il profilo storico*, in: E. Bartoletti, [ed al.], *Chiesa locale e cooperazione tra le Chiese. Settimana di studi missionari*, Bologna 1973, p. 17.

Furthermore, in 1854, Pius IX stressed that apostolic charity is the moral basis of apostolic and missionary prayer. The Church must pray intensely so that all the peoples are converted to Christ, and it must pledge itself with all its forces for the salvation of humanity.¹²

The same pope encouraged initiatives in bringing together the faithful for the defence of the faith. To such a goal, with his support and blessing, there was founded in 1867 the Società della Gioventù cattolica (Society of Catholic Youth), whose programme was able to be summed up in three words “prayer – action – sacrifice.” The young, wanting to stand out against the spirit of the time, put themselves at the service of the Holy See. Seven years later, moreover, the Opera dei Congressi (Work of the Congress) was established with the goal of obstructing the widespread liberal spirit and of defending the rights of the Church.¹³

Thanks to such innovative initiatives on the doctrine of the laity with respect to that of the preceding pontiffs, the engagement of the lay during the papacy of Pius IX began to show an irreplaceable assistance for the ecclesiastical hierarchy against the Masonic tendencies of the period. Nevertheless there lingered an underlying mistrust concerning the integration of the lay in the apostolic activity of the Church.¹⁴ In the apostolic letter *Exortae in ista* (1876), the Pope invited the lay, for their benefit, to be subject to their legitimate pastors as they were not designated by Jesus Christ with spiritual power. It belongs to the lay to become, according to their status, help for the clergy, but not to interfere in the doctrinal aspects entrusted by Jesus to the pastors.¹⁵

The successor of Pius IX, Pope Leo XIII, in the encyclical *Sancta Dei civitas* published in 1880, committing all the faithful to enter into the movement of missionary cooperation, urged them at the same time to prayer and material assistance. These two kinds of cooperation, which consist in giving and in praying, are very useful to expand the limits of the Kingdom of God.

¹² Pio IX, Allocutio *Singulari quadam* (09.12.1854), in: *Acta Pii IX P.M.*, pars I/1, Romae, 1857, p. 627.

¹³ Cf. B. Mondin, *Pio IX*, in: *Dizionario enciclopedico dei papi. Storia e insegnamenti*, Roma 1995, p. 461f.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Semeraro, *Con la Chiesa nel mondo. Il laicato nella storia nella teologia nel Magistero*, (Intellectus fidei; 6), Roma 1991, p. 57.

¹⁵ Pius IX, Apostolic letter *Exortae in ista* (20.04.1876), ASS 9 (1876), p. 325.

They can easily be accomplished by men of whatever condition.¹⁶ With the union of all, they can provide great help to each other. The Pope emphasised how great will be the reward that will be due to the one who, having spent money for the missions however meagre but enriched by a prayer, carried out many and varied works of charity.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Pontiff reasserted the primary function of authority, to which belongs the custody of truth and the spiritual responsibility of the persons.¹⁸ In a letter of 1885 to Cardinal Giber he confirmed that it is:

incontestable and absolutely clear that in the Church, consistent with its character, there are two clearly distinct states: the pastors and the flock, that is the leaders and the people. The first has the function of teaching, of governing and of giving men the necessary laws; the other has the duty of submitting themselves to the first, of obeying them, of carrying out their orders, of showing them respect.¹⁹

Heinrich Hahn – spouse, family father, Christian doctor, citizen

Heinrich Joseph Hubert Hahn²⁰ was born 29 August 1800 at Aachen into a deeply Catholic family. At the age of seven, he began attending primary school at Aachen, laying an excellent foundation in his knowledge of French

¹⁶ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Sancta Dei civitas*, (03.12.1880), in: *Acta Leonis XIII P.M.*, II, Romae, 1882, 170. Cf. A. Seumois, *L'anima dell'apostolato missionario*. (Studi Missionari; 1), Bologna 1961², p. 154; M. Nembro, *Le direttive della Chiesa docente sul laicato missionario*, in: *Il laicato cattolico dei paesi di missione. Atti della seconda settimana di studi missionari, Milano, 4-8 settembre 1961*, Milano 1962, p. 80.

¹⁷ *Sancta Dei civitas*, p. 177f. Cf. J.M. Gonzalez, *Los documentos pontificios y la cooperación de los católicos en la obra de las misiones*, (Folletos misionales; 001), México [s.d.], p. 8-10.

¹⁸ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (15.05.1891), ASS 23 (1890-1891), p. 670.

¹⁹ Leo XIII, Lettera *Est sane molestum* (17.12.1888), ASS 21 (1888), p. 322. Cf. A.M. Erba, *Laico (storia del)*, in: E. Ancilli, (ed.), *Dizionario di spiritualità dei laici*, Milano, 1981, p. 387.

²⁰ All the information on Heinrich Hahn comes from: Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, Prot. N. 2372, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Henrici Hahn, Christifidelis Laici et Patrisfamilias (1800-1882). Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis*. Roma 2012.

and Latin, both fundamental for his future studies. After secondary school, he continued his scientific education in the prestigious imperial gymnasium of Bonn and then, from 1814 to 1818, at the Athénée Royal of Brussels.

From 1818 to 1822, Hahn dedicated himself to the study of medicine. He should have sat for the final examination in 1821 but on account of his young age he was not admitted and had to wait a year. However on 23 July 1822 the youth from Aachen defended his dissertation written in Latin with the title *De relationibus quibus organa nostra inter se et cum corporibus circumfusis connectuntur*, conferring the title of doctor in medicine.

After having received this title that gave him the right to practice his profession in the Netherlands, Heinrich Hahn decided to return to his homeland and begin the experience for the recognition of his title in Prussia. Thus in the month of November 1822 he transferred to Berlin, where he carried out service for a year with the twelfth company of the regiment of the grenadiers in the capacity of voluntary surgeon. On 15 May 1824 Heinrich underwent the ministerial examination obtaining full approval and certificate of “general practitioner, surgeon, and gynaecologist in the territory of the Prussian Kingdom”.

A short time later Dr. Hahn transferred to Aachen and opened a doctor’s office practising his profession with great zeal and devotion. In particular he offered his service to the poor and needy and dedicated himself also effectively to administrative, political and apostolic activities.

On 17 February 1829, Heinrich Hahn married Maria Barbara Odilia Kändler. Their marriage, which lasted more than 37 years, was a happy marriage that realised itself in fullness: the married couple was in fact close-knit. From the writings of Dr. Hahn, he articulates great respect and tenderness towards his wife. From their marriage 10 children were born. His letters and diaries are the best source for tracing his personality regarding his family: from those pages, in fact, there emerges the figure of a caring father who knew how to join strength with tenderness, seriousness with joviality. Heinrich Hahn, in addition with his own example, through letters addressed to his daughters communicated to them important lessons and shared with them his private affairs and his professional and social engagements. He placed great stress on the education and cultural development of his daughters. Together with intellectual and cultural education, for him no less important was religious education. His holiness was rooted in his family. With his dear ones, he prayed every day for all people and for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. The prayer of the parents, as that of the Christian community, represented for the children

an initiation to the pursuit of God and to the hearing of His word. As every Christian prayer, that family one included also the exhortation to missionary work and to evangelisation. In fact, the missionaries, according to evangelical logic, constantly urged prayers and sacrifices as a most powerful aid for their evangelising work. The Hahn family knew that prayer accompanied the path and the work of missionaries so that the announcement of the Word would be made fruitful by divine grace. Families, through prayer and sympathy, and in particular through missionary vocations, opened up internally, cooperate effectively in spreading the Gospel in all the corners of the world. He was convinced that prayer would become in some way a living expression of thanks for the evangelisation that reached and continued to take hold in the whole world. At the same time prayer turns itself into an invocation to the Lord so that He can use us as instruments of His will, granting us the indispensable moral and material means for the construction of His Kingdom.

Thanks to his academic training and to the medical profession, the family made its entry into the upper middle class, but nevertheless, the values of the Hahn family did not change: they kept alive, in fact, the Catholic faith and a fervent religious practice. After having demonstrated diligence in studies and commitment in life, Dr. Hahn succeeded in establishing himself and in being much esteemed in his profession. In time, he succeeded however in reaching a certain well-being: in the “civic list” of 1850 Heinrich Hahn appeared in fact among the first fifty richest persons in Aachen. Such status furnished a certain economic security for his family, which permitted him, above all in the second part of his life, to dedicate himself to social, relief, apostolic, and missionary activities. Even after entry into the upper middle class, he lived nevertheless modestly without great pretensions: his daughters were still raised with sobriety and simplicity. Even in parliament in Berlin, Dr. Hahn distinguished himself from his parliamentary colleagues by his temperance and modesty.

Beyond the intense activity inherent in his profession, he dedicated himself to the publication of articles and treatises on medical subjects, as well as a historical work, in five volumes, on the Catholic missions and a monumental literary work on Christian love; he held as well offices of public administration in the city council of Aachen and in various committees up to becoming a member of the Chamber of Deputies for Prussia.

After his marriage, despite having had to reorganize his professional activity in order to see to his family, he always maintained contact with the poorest, available to lend his service for free. This attitude of attention and

care for the lowest classes was his trademark above all in the most difficult periods: typhus (1827), hunger riot (1830), and the cholera epidemic (1832). From the awareness of his relationship with Christ thaumaturge, he poured out his ethos of doctor and man. In fact, for him scientific research represented a true vocation to be put to the service of people in order to try to control the danger presented by those diseases, like tuberculosis, that strike above all the more destitute classes of the population.

His profession as doctor was continually carried out in the middle of the poor, and it was this motivation that would qualify him, into advanced age, to act with a rare personal devotion. Among the particular aspects of his medical profession, Dr. Hahn distinguished himself by close examination and hydrotherapeutic specialisation because it made use of the natural capabilities of the thermal cures for chronic illnesses, justifying theologically such approach before his scientist colleagues and trying to extend this therapy to the poorest and most needy persons.

During the years of the cholera epidemic (1832) he did his best for the prevention of epidemics, presenting a petition to the city council for the construction of a mortuary chapel. Furthermore, he had a suitable duct constructed for the disposal of sewage in order to avoid the rise and spreading of cholera. He carried out numerous health measures for the protection of the most exposed population, including the military. Numerous were his interventions on the side of workers and their families, doing his best to suggest various measures of social aid, such as the free distribution of bread to the most needy workers.

The medical profession of Heinrich Hahn was always narrowly linked with his profound religious faith, beginning with his daily participation at the Holy Mass: he never had career oriented ambitions or theoretical projects detached from reality; his spiritual vision consisted in taking care with love of every needy person, of whatever social class he might be. In the last phase of his life he had no fear of clashing with a purely rational and atheist vision of the world, spread by his colleagues: he lined up totally against a positivistic, secularised and anticlerical religion.

From 1846 to 1881, that is for 35 years, Heinrich Hahn was a member of the local city government of Aachen and undertook such commitment responsibly participating regularly in the city council meetings with significant contributions. In doing that Hahn involved himself in a constructive and competent manner in the entire range of subjects relevant for city politics that went from the development of the spa town of Aachen to financial and

administrative questions to the politics of the Kingdom up to his favoured fields of health and social issues, of education and culture, of the Church and the religious orders. In the assembly of the city council of 21 April 1876 he gave a memorable speech that prompted on that very same day the voting and introduction of universal suffrage in Aachen.

Heinrich Hahn – Catholic politician, committed for the missions

Dr. Hahn developed the associative mission in a continuative and intense way for all his life, sometimes founding, reforming and participating directly, also with supervising assignments, at several religious brotherhoods – of the Most Holy Sacrament, Caritas, Marian Congregation, of San Michele, of the Heart of Jesus, of San Carlo Borromeo – and associations whether political – *Piusverein*, *Constantia* – or professional.

Political involvement was another field of action of Dr. Hahn: the aim of his memberships in associations of a political character was that of safeguarding Christian values defending the Catholic Church. His presence in these associations brought about growth in the importance given to the religious aspect in respect to the political one. Among them, the *Piusverein* stands out: a Catholic association born for the liberty and defence of the Church, of which he was one of the founding fathers.

Among the activities of Dr. Hahn the inclination for the orders and religious congregations stands out and above all for those operating within health care and education. The orders and religious congregations, indeed through their charismata and their spirit of self-denial and sacrifice, were more suitable for aid to the sick, the elderly, and the abandoned children, and to the reintegration of prostitutes into society. Also facing the obstacles put up by the Prussian government, Dr. Hahn always did all he could to favour and sustain, even financially, the establishment of religious communities at Aachen.

In 1858, Heinrich Hahn was elected a member of the Chamber of Deputies for the three-year term 1859 – 1861: in order to participate in the parliamentary sessions that took place mainly from January to April he had to reside in Berlin. In Parliament, he joined the Catholic faction of the Centre Party (*Deutsche Zentrumspartei*) and remained faithful to his political and religious ideals: freedom for the Church, freedom of Christian teaching, freedom of religious association. The concept of freedom was not only tied to the

individual, but it also pointed to the absolute administrative and organisational autonomy of the Church in Germany: not only therefore individual liberty but also corporative.

Without doubt it is to be stressed that the life and the work of Dr. Heinrich Hahn is linked to the concern and to the missionary interest, as the monumental publication in five volumes “Geschichte der katholischen Missionen” (1857-1863) attests – the first systematic history of the Catholic missions, certainly compiled by one who is not a professional historian and therefore simple but effusive and enthusiastic – composed depicting times in an extraordinarily intense activity. The founding of the Association of Saint Francis Xavier (*Franziskus-Xaverius-Verein*), in narrow collaboration with *l’Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi* (*Works of the Propagation of the Faith*) of Lyon, was of course the activity that greatly distinguished him in the ecclesiastical and missionary fields. His principal effort was oriented to the maintaining of the unity of the Association with *l’Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi* of Lyon, in the struggle against its fragmentation at the national level; he tried, moreover, to favour its universality.

Despite the repeated efforts, in part endorsed also by some bishops, judged an expression of improper patriotism and nationalism, and therefore strenuously hard-fought, to loosen and to dissolve the link with *l’Oeuvre*, Dr. Hahn cultivated and promoted co-existence, also with the personal friendship with the secretary pro tempore Dominique Meynis. Nevertheless, also in this context of the respected relationship with Lyon, he knew how to take on independent decisions, as in the case of the contract with the publisher DuMont-Schauberg.²¹

²¹ “In truth, the Association of Saint Francis Xavier has a truly Catholic character, both through the organization and through the participation by the top of the Catholic Church and the larger part of the Catholic bishops. The great distinguishing points of unity and community that Jesus Christ stamped on His Holy Church are reflected fully in this liberal work and at the same time elevated, by Christian love for the greatest glorification of the Lord [...]. What would there be of the support for the Catholic missions if Belgium, England, Italy, Spain, Portugal and more generally every other country proceeded in the same manner establishing its own missionary association and distributing financial aid according to its own arbitrary manner? The Catholic way would be abandoned following the footsteps of the Protestants; the whole unity would become lost, few missions would be much supported; others perhaps not at all” (Congregatio, *Beatificationis*, p. 358).

From the intense and continuous correspondence that developed in time between Heinrich Hahn and the head office of Lyon, through its secretary, Dominique Meynis, there trickled out clearly the burning interest of the Servant of God for the Catholic missions, the unqualified esteem, the great respect and the trust, the strong sense of reciprocal gratitude. The Central Council of Lyon shared in full the opinion and the conduct of Dr. Hahn. The Catholic association was energetically motivated to grow, through supporting particularly the poorer classes, in territories where the majority was Protestant.

At the beginning of the 1840s, following the obtaining of state authorisation, there was officially set up the *Franziskus-Xaverius-Verein*, which not only spread rapidly in the archdiocese of Cologne, but also in the whole territory of the Prussian monarchy. Other dioceses of Prussia were joined, such as those of Düsseldorf, Paderborn, Hildesheim, Trier, Münster, Osnabrück and Fulda. The new archbishop of Cologne, Mons. Clement August Droste zu Vischering, despite continuing to support the spreading of the work through a pastoral letter, had direct talks with Dr. Hahn which were not without discussions: the arguments of the latter turned out so strong and convincing that the seat of the Association was not transferred to Cologne but remained in Aachen. During the period of the Kulturkampf, the Servant of God subjected himself without fear of danger to life, in order to spread the Work, notwithstanding the harsh climate of repression towards the Church. Heinrich Hahn was available to welcome the worries and the criticisms of the German bishops, becoming their spokesman for the main office in Lyon: he never displayed rigidity or prejudices in that regard, but he was always ready for an open and sincere face-off, in order to find the best solution to make the interventions of the missionary associations effective. The Central Council of Lyon recognised the wisdom of Heinrich Hahn in facing the problems that were being gradually created in the various German dioceses.

His relationship with the bishops, who didn't always support him in his work, was always respectful and submissive, never giving up the perseverance of his own ideas, as in the instance of the aired transfer of the seat of the *Franziskus* from Aachen to Cologne.²²

²² In 1972, the *Franziskus-Xaverius-Verein* and the *Ludwigsmiissionsverein* were united and affiliated with the Congregation of the Propaganda of the Faith (named later the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples).

Heinrich Hahn reacted promptly against the possible national fragmentation of the *Oeuvre*²³; in fact, for him the universal yearning of the ideal missionary²⁴ was not able to be fully respected and promoted if it were not supported by initiatives fully released from the national context.²⁵ In this perspective renewed were the relationships carried on with the Prussian *Bonifatiusverein*, with the Austrian *Leopoldinnenverein* and the Bavarian *Ludwigmissionsverein*, with which Dr. Hahn either attempted a fusion with the association directed by him – with this last one it happened in 1972 as a dependency of the Roman Congregation of the Evangelisation of the Peoples – or foiled efforts of dissolution of his own into the Bavarian one, subject to splitting from Lyon.

For Hahn Christianity represents a civilising force that preserves entire peoples from being adrift in paganism.²⁶ The mission is the effective sign of the fecundity of the Church, and the flowering of the nineteenth century shows how the Lord always stands with the Church, even during the harshest persecutions; it is really the suffering because of the Christian testimony that places solid bases for a spiritual rebirth.²⁷

The centre of Dr. Hahn's Christian action was certainly represented by his undertakings for the missions; this commitment for the work of the propagation of the faith was a brilliant sign of his deep union with the Church and of his identification with the missionary mandate. The missionary spirit

²³ “It was in fact well realized that a centralized administration would have been able to have a global vision of the Catholic missions and would have been able therefore to intervene with greater timeliness and generosity where the need was greater” (p. 325).

²⁴ “In reality the Association Saint Francis Xavier became to be considered a ‘French association’, while basically it aimed in general at a missionary activity completely autonomous and rigorously limited to the German lands, with the immediate consequence of action turned to the assistance of Catholics in the diaspora” (p. 390ff.).

²⁵ “In the last few years German Catholics have raised the question if it might not be opportune to substitute the Association Saint Francis Xavier, which has French origins and whose headquarters is located in France, with a German missionary society to be founded from the beginning. Only a poorly interpreted patriotism can prompt such a suggestion. The burning national feeling has, unfortunately, often caused in the past very grave damage to the Catholic Church. In truth, the Association Saint Francis Xavier ... has a truly Catholic character” (p. 358).

²⁶ H. Hahn, *Übersicht der Einnahmen des Xaverius-Vereins zur Unterstützung der Katholischen Missionen während des Jahres 1852*, Köln 1853, p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

showed itself not only in the evangelisation of the people, but also in doing his untiringly best to bring others closer to the missionary assignment of the Lord.

The idea of founding the missionary association *Franciscus-Xaverius-Verein* was to create a support and a defence for the actions of the Catholic Church, as represented by the neediest classes of the population, in areas substantially with a Protestant majority. The founding of a Catholic missionary association became necessary because, in parallel with the Protestant side, there was instituted a similar one, named after the King of Sweden, Gustav II Adolf, an institution that, however, opposed the Catholic religion with animosity.

Heinrich Hahn – layman, saint

The mission of the lay finds expression in two equally essential directions: that of evangelising with sanctification through personal testimony in his own environment (in particular in the family and in the professional workplace, besides the ecclesiastical community, especially in the area of non-ordained ministers), and that of the animation and perfection of the order according to the design of God. Holiness and mission are inseparable aspects of the vocation of every baptised person. The saint is the true man, whose testimony of life draws, consults, and carries away because it shows a transparent human experience, filled by the presence of Christ. The commitment to become holy is united with that of spreading the message of salvation. The more one lives in a holy way, the more efficient the evangelising becomes. Hahn in capacity of founding the Association *Franciskus Xaverius* for the Catholic mission, at the present time Opera Pontificia *Missio*, is a model for the concept of missions that in words and in deeds pledge themselves untiringly to the spreading and the defence of the faith, as well as to the apostolate, development and peace.

The figure of Heinrich Hahn embodies, in an exemplary manner, the path of German Catholicism in the nineteenth century. His example galvanised the generation of German Catholics of the second half of that century and represented for them a notable impetus on a level of practical action, in a difficult situation from the social and ecclesiastical point of view.²⁸ His background was made up of faith that made his action spring forth in tune

²⁸ Congregatio, *Beatificationis*, p. 23.

with the Church; rather the Church was really his point of departure, that port from which to sail forth in order to navigate in the complexity of the world.

One hundred years later, the Council Fathers, in article 31 of *Lumen gentium*, presenting the nature and mission of the lay, underlined their specific call to holiness for the sanctification of the world “ab intra” in order to animate it with all its own actions:

Therein they are called by God to contribute, almost from inside in a way of ferment, to the sanctification of the world exercising their office under the guidance of the evangelical spirit, and in this way to show Christ to others principally with the testimony of their own life and with the brilliance of their faith, of their hope and charity.

The sanctification to which the Council Fathers refer doesn't deprive the world at all of its own value. The holiness of the lay also has its strictly “secular” specificity. Thus their sanctification realises itself in the professional, social, and daily life. If their vocation and mission are in the world, sanctification also takes place in the world. Since Christ became incarnate for all, all are called to divine union. Jesus gives a specific vocation to each one of his disciples, independently from his status and condition. Thus, every believer, without exception, will have to look for sanctity in the duties and the contingencies of everyday life.

Dr. Hahn always showed a firm consistency with his professed faith in all his numerous areas of life: the family, professional, welfare, missionary, editorial. His conduct was always characterised by the desire to commit himself to the very end to defend the freedom of the Catholic Church, to support the pastoral action of the bishops and to spread pontifical teaching. His deep political knowledge was placed at the service of this project, given above all not in the appearance of exhibitionism, but rather in welfare and in the support of internal and external missions. His commitment in the political field was aimed exclusively at improving the conditions of life of the weakest and poorest classes. Heinrich Hahn could be defined a “social politician” who tried without interruption to safeguard the religious principles and the loyalty of the Catholic Church. This is why his interests turned beyond the suffering also to the institutions and to the religious congregations, to the Catholic schools. Notwithstanding all that, he never neglected his professional duties, his medical training, constantly kept current, and the problems relative to health.

He was invested by Pope Pius IX with the title of Knight of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great and of Commander of the same Order: these honours show how his total participation for the missions was much appreciated by the German ecclesiastical hierarchy, and also, at the greatest level, by the Supreme Pontiff.

From the beginning of 1880 his health deteriorated: he was struck, in particular, by a long and painful illness which weakened him and exhausted him with shooting pains. In the middle of December 1881 his health worsened so much that, facing a situation so serious, the doctors gave him only a few days of life and, on his request, at the end of that same December the last rites were administered to him. The suffering dragged on until March 1882. He died on 11 March 1882 at the age of 81 years and five months. On 14 March the obsequies were celebrated with a very large crowd participation, and the coffin was escorted not only by family members but also by numerous representatives of the city's clergy and by many religious. He was buried in the family tomb, in the western cemetery of Aachen, and on the tombstone the eloquent expression often repeated by him was engraved: "Spes mea Christus"²⁹.

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²⁹ On 17th of December 2015 the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, with the authorization of Holy Father Francis, promulgated the decree regarding the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Heinrich Hahn.

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A Faith that Breathes: Toward a Missionary Impetus in Europe

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The topic that is chosen forces one to touch upon aspects with which most of us are familiar. However, the methodology used would be different. We shall attempt at looking at the Christian Faith with a dual missionary scope. One, to revive the content of Faith presenting its capacity to transform human thinking, and two, to thereby be a catalyst for a missionary impetus in Europe.

At the very outset, the readers are cautioned that the fields of missionary involvement in Europe be it social or pastoral will not be directly touched upon in this article. We shall remain within the limits of our topic on the Christian Faith showing its capacity to renew perspectives on human and divine realities which in turn could prove useful mainly in the pastoral context. Hence the themes treated in this paper would be concerned more with pastoral mission and evangelization. We cannot, at the same time, enter into all the aspects of the Christian Faith which would be impossible in this paper. The target group of our reflections would be the baptized Catholics highly secularized and estranged from the Church – the “neo-pagans” of Europe – who are baptized but live as practical atheists or agnostics. These reflections, furthermore, could also be relevant to the Christians and non-Christians at large.

If European Catholics are not frequenting the sacraments or are not following the Christian Faith, then one of the reasons could be that they are thinking of the Christian Faith in a certain way. What would Yves Daniel and Henri Godin have done in this situation? Knowing fully well their primary intention of publishing their book in 1943 – *France Pays de Mission*?¹, they

¹ The milieu in which Daniel and Godin lived was a challenging one for the Church which was slowly losing ground among the intellectuals and the working class. It was while

would have doubtlessly revisited certain aspects of the Christian Faith in the present milieu to proclaim it; rather, to “implant” it among the “neo-pagan” Catholics in a way that they are educated more radically in the Christian Faith.

Quite a few Catholics, on the one hand, do not feel the need for God and the Christian Faith because these “aspects” do not presumably touch their lives and remain an insignificant set of information. On the other hand, with financial security and other securities assured by the government or other agencies which reduces a lot of stress and fear, and which are good in themselves, comes certain self-sufficiency in the individual thereby not feeling the need for supernatural intervention unless other problems are experienced where no kind of human-created securities help. However, this may not be the case with every individual, still, as is our common experience, it is suffering, fear, or calamities in life that may truly lead the Catholic to seek God when all other avenues have been sought without success. Frequency to the Church and its sacraments becomes less when there is no felt need for the same. Invitations to frequent the Church will not help if the Catholic does not find the very Faith he/she professes meaningful and helpful. What may perhaps be needed is a way of thinking that could make a difference to the individual Catholic and which could be offered only by the Christian Faith.

Our *modus procedendi* here, therefore, would be to consider aspects of the Christian Faith in general touching upon a couple of dogmas to bring the Christian Faith in a better light or a better breath as our title implies and thereby perceiving the need for its renewed proclamation to the European Catholics.

Christian Faith is missionary by its very nature

It is our contention that the Christian Faith and not only the Church is missionary by its very nature. We have taken our cue from Ad Gentes 2 and in continuation, we can add, “since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that it draws its origin with the decree of God the

responding to this situation that perspectival changes were required which were highlighted by the book. Two years before the book was published, the bishops of France on 24 July 1941, started “Mission de France” which facilitated the idea of the Young Christian Workers Movement which in turn enabled the young Christians of the workers class to receive Christian education and training.

Father”. The Christian Faith is presumed as missioned by God in line with the understanding of AG 2 because the perspectives that are involved in the Christian Faith are not human-made creations or imaginations but are revelations of God in Jesus Christ even though these revelations are couched within a language of a certain cultural and historical period². It is understandable to see the Church as missionary right from its inception but to see the Christian Faith as missionary would simply mean, at least in this paper, that the Christian Faith is knowledge offered (“sent”) to transform thinking and thereby living that is beneficial for salvation. The Christian Faith contains knowledge or perspectives which if accepted and imbibed would lead to great change in human beings. Keeping in mind the missionary intention that Yves Daniel and Henri Godin had of bringing the Church (Christian Faith) to the estranged Catholics, we need to understand that the Christian Faith as knowledge must be revisited or re-proclaimed as such for a greater missionary impact in Europe. Before we enter into a brief discussion of how we understand knowledge in Christian Faith, we need to state that Christian Faith, at least from the philosophical point of view, would be considered more as a belief rather than knowledge. But even philosophically belief and knowledge are connected if not identical.³ As far as we are concerned, we can assert that knowledge is involved in the Christian Faith at least in two ways.

Firstly, the knowledge involved in this case is understood more in the Scriptural sense. Knowledge in Scripture is more complex than the understanding of knowledge in Western philosophy which stems from Greek philosophy. For Western speculation, knowledge is more an intellectual apprehension of reality that leads to a judgement of the truth perceived.⁴ Logical rationality is part of the Western view of knowledge leading to certitude in the judgment of truth. The Old Testament does not limit itself to the Western or Greek understanding of knowledge, appearing more profound since the heart was involved in the act of knowing. There is in fact no word in Hebrew which

² This does not mean that the Greco-Roman language was made to impinge upon the Divine truth revealed in Jesus Christ decreasing its absolute veracity. If this was the case, the theological concepts of the Trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection, and others would have been toned down to suit the cultural and linguistic presuppositions of the Greco-Roman world.

³ For an elaborate discussion on this theme see D.M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*, London – Cambridge 1973.

⁴ Cf. J. Mckenzie, “Knowledge”, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Bangalore 2002, p. 485.

accurately corresponds to our “mind” or “intellect”.⁵ Knowledge therefore in the Old Testament must be understood in a more general way that involves feelings as well.⁶ It is an encounter with another leading to some knowledge and acquaintance of the other (Ex 1:8; Dt 9:2; 1 Sam 10:11). After an encounter with *YHWH*, if one says that he does not know *YHWH*, it signifies not so much an intellectual incapacity to know or an error in judgment or even a refusal to know *YHWH*, rather a rejection of *YHWH* himself. To know *YHWH* as God, does not mean an intellectual grasp of his divine nature.⁷ Knowledge of *YHWH* rather depended on believing *YHWH*'s divine status. Knowledge, therefore, in the Old Testament “supposes as well an indispensable link with faith and with what has been revealed”.⁸ It does not abolish reason but rather “liberates reason in so far as it allows reason to attain correctly what it seeks to know and to place it within the ultimate order of things, in which everything acquires true meaning”.⁹ It “sharpens the inner eye, opening the mind to discover in the flux of events the workings of Providence... ‘The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps’ (Prov 16:9)”.¹⁰ It is within this framework that knowledge as “Wisdom” must be perceived both in a human and a divine way to realise that it is divine wisdom that makes human wisdom appear foolish: a theme common to the New Testament (1 Cor 1:20).

In the New Testament, one often notices an attitude of contrasting “the wisdom of this world” and the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ.¹¹

The crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief. The true key-point, which

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 486.

⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 21. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html (28.04.2019)

⁹ Ibid., no. 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., no.16.

¹¹ Ibid., no. 23.

challenges every philosophy, is Jesus Christ's death on the Cross.¹²

In the same vein, a God who is Father, Son, Holy Spirit may seem foolish and untenable to the non-believing philosopher but is divine wisdom itself to the believer. This does not mean that there are no instances of the Hellenistic influence on knowledge in the New Testament but that the Old Testament influence of the appetitive (feeling) aspect of knowledge is still strong. To know involves a cognitive grasp of things (Rm 7:7), to recognize and accept as well (Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39; Eph 5:5, etc.).¹³ It is "an insight which is the fruit of the process of revelation and faith".¹⁴ Knowledge is also seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:8). There is a dynamism as well between knowledge and love that one notices in John. To know is to love and to love is to know (1 Jn 4:7-8; 16, 20). One may come to know Jesus by an objective study about him and his works but this knowledge is not the knowledge that the Christian has of Jesus according to John, which is the fruit of love and faith and not of human investigation. In short, knowledge of God (Jesus) in Scripture, more than a speculative, logical judgement, is an existential encounter.

Secondly, knowledge as verified knowledge of an article of the Christian Faith does exist in the history of early Christian testimony. The Risen Christ was touched, felt, and spoken to by the Apostles (Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-18; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-10). If certitude of any knowledge depends on verification, then the resurrection narratives are in fact verification narratives of the knowledge of the Risen Jesus¹⁵. It is this verification that is believed by the forthcoming generations. Even though theories exist about the non-veracity of the resurrection narratives as Midrash, they are not conclusive. The verified knowledge of the resurrection is upheld and believed because it was and is factually and historically true.

¹² Ibid., no. 23.

¹³ J. Mckenzie, op. cit., p. 486.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 487.

¹⁵ Cf. L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series 3, ed. D.J. Harrington, Collegeville 1991, p. 389-391. Johnson states: "...the traditions concerning the first encounters between the risen Lord and his followers were handed on from the first as historical validation for the spiritual transformation (1 Thess 1:9-10; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:3-8; Gal 1:15-16)".

Having said the above, the point to be considered is not so much the historicity of the truth claim that awaits justification at the altar of natural science which we know by now is much more complex than we think because of the different levels of truth and methodology, but the efficacy of that truth claim. Does the resurrection, for example, have any use for me? This would be the question that a Christian of today would ask a missionary. There could be various responses. The resurrection helps our salvation but then this salvation must be felt tangibly in our existential reality or else the salvation argument becomes like the “pie in the sky” argument and does not impact the people of today. Furthermore, salvation in itself, a truth claim of the Christian Faith, is fundamentally an offer to humanity as a salvific truth and therefore a “utilitarian” truth. The utilitarian argument for the Christian Faith, even if not well appreciated, is intrinsic to the Christian Faith because salvation or integral salvation seeks the well-being of an individual whether in this life or the life to come and it is this argument that holds great missionary potential for the present generation.

We could finally infer the following that the knowledge or the truth claims of the Christian Faith are potentially liberating or eye-opening leading the follower thereby to perceive life in a manner that makes a healthy difference and brings about transformation. In this dynamic, the knowledge of Christian Faith becomes personal, interior, and experiential and thereby significant helping mission and evangelization today to achieve its fundamental objectives.

The Resurrection

Having dealt with the resurrection in the context of knowledge in the preceding section, we could begin by asking the question straight away: Does the Resurrection make sense to the European mind? We do not have statistics but from our experience, we know that there are Europeans, whether Christians or not, who would not believe in the resurrection or life after death. One of the reasons could be that resurrection perhaps robs them of the present. Here one is no longer able to perceive the beauty of this existential life because of a belief that talks of a better life hereafter. It is this criterion which makes thinkers like Bertolt Brecht consider belief in the afterlife, in the resurrection, as obstacles to fully respond to the problems and exigencies of this

life.¹⁶ This is what he is quoted to have said: “Do not delude yourselves with lies. Like the beasts man simply dies, and after that comes nothing.”¹⁷ This kind of pessimism destroys life itself. If the outcome of this life, however beautiful it may seem is death, then it can have a death-full impact on life itself.

However, under the criterion that the future gives meaning to the present, our lives receive a certain fullness and wholesomeness in the reality of the resurrection. If a transformation of this life is the outcome, then hope is created in the very expectancy of that transformation. It is within this hope that the present life is interpreted and safe-guarded. Furthermore, within the parameter of such safe-guarding, human beings will respond to the problems and exigencies of this life upholding all good that sustains life. The Resurrection of Jesus is a judgement on the perspective of the unlimited glorification of this life. At the same time, the glorification of life in the future gives infinite meaning to the present. We need to take care of this life eliminating all the insecurities, fears, and sufferings but if this life is looked at as an end in itself with the perspectives of absolute materialism, then such living will lead to the problem of hopelessness because the outcome is death. There has got to be a reality beyond death to give meaning to our lives. The truth of human life is distorted by a limited understanding of it. The *élan* of human life lies in the resurrection. But the resurrection, as a reality belonging to the afterlife, may appear as escapism. Not so because resurrection is not the afterlife of this life as a reality disconnected from this life but a continuation to this life or the fulfillment of it. This life remains unfulfilled and meaningless without the resurrection. But someone could very well say that he or she is feeling fulfilled and meaningful without believing in the resurrection. This is an emotional state of the mind or heart and emotional states do vacillate from presence to absence. No emotional state remains continuous or permanent. Fulfillment and meaningfulness have certain permanency which, inclusive of emotions and feelings, still go beyond them. As a historical¹⁸ and meta-historical reality, the resurrection is an invitation to give meaning to this life.

¹⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe*, San Francisco 2009, p. 104.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For the historical arguments of the resurrection see W. Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, Philadelphia 1968, p. 88-106; N. Lash, *Easter Meaning*, “Heythrop Journal” 25 (1984) p. 12-18.

We would also know of many believing in life after death but that belief is influenced by a certain dualism of the soul and body where the immortality of the soul is seen in contrast to the mortality of the body. This contrast is intensified when the soul (spirit) is seen as more important to the body in the conception of the person and existence in general. The underlying thesis of the soul-body contrast was that matter was evil. Gnosticism, Docetism, and some major religions of Asia which are by now an integral part of the European culture tend to glorify the soul or spirit to the detriment of the body because the body is seen as a prison to the soul. The body is the outcome of karma (“sinful” actions) according to the religions that stem from India. For final liberation, therefore, “sinful” actions must be avoided to avoid thereby the formation of the body. These perspectives lead to a “missionary” situation. However convincing the argumentation of these perspectives may be, the Christian understanding of the resurrection must be presented to these contexts in Europe rather, missioned to these contexts of Europe for a more wholistic living because in the resurrection the salvation of the whole person (body and soul) is upheld and by doing so the person gains a positive approach towards his/her present existential status.

Another reason for the resurrection not making sense to the European mind could be that there is no firsthand experience of the resurrection like the one of the Apostles. A majority of Catholics would believe in the resurrection but are not gripped by that reality like the early Christians were. The fundamental question to be asked is does the resurrection, apart from making sense, really make a difference to Christians today in their lives? If it did, there would not have been any necessity of a special missionary mandate to today’s Christians because the resurrection experience, like that of the first generation Christians, would naturally create a conscientious obligation towards its proclamation. Unfortunately, it does not happen because the impact of the resurrection is not felt today. In such circumstances, the resurrection does appear more an idealistic element of the Christian Faith which is believed to take place in the end times but it does not affect us because it is not our experience. How to make it our experience would be a missionary question to be tackled at various levels of missionary involvement. However, one wonders how could such an experience be stimulated in the faithful if the truth of the resurrection is endangered by theories from theologians and scholars which are incompatible to the original understanding of the reality of the resurrection as upheld by the Church. This creates a missionary situation in the Western world where

the truth of the resurrection needs to be defended from the symbolic theories that surround it.

Various criteria like the symbolism criterion and others are used for the resurrection to explain away the resurrection in reductionist terms or to negate its historical factuality. It seeks to understand the resurrection narratives like analogies that signify the continuous divine action of God in and through the deep transformation that the disciples went through and not the physical revival of the dead Jesus when both these aspects need to go together. There is a trend among Christian scholars, theologians, clergy, and others to present the resurrection claims in a way that the dogmatic understanding of the resurrection is no longer valid. To take the famous case of Roger Haight for example, where the author in the section on Jesus' resurrection has a sub-section entitled "The symbol of Resurrection", and at a certain point states that the language of the resurrection narratives in the New Testament is

symbolic of experience that is historically mediated. The divergent responses to the question show that one cannot determine the exact nature of this experience by critical-historical means. But one can examine the clues in the New Testament that point toward the symbolic character of the language of the appearances.¹⁹

The resurrection, therefore, is not considered as a historical fact *per se* but as analogically referring to "another order of reality that transcends this world...".²⁰ "For this reason", Haight continues, "it is better to say that Jesus' resurrection is not a historical fact because the idea of a historical fact suggests an empirical event which could have been witnessed and can now be imaginatively construed"²¹. Paul Winter in the epilogue to his book, *On the Trial of Jesus*, states: "Crucified, dead and buried, he yet rose in the hearts

¹⁹ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, New York 1999, p. 131.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²¹ *Ibid.* The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, in 2004, condemned various points of Haight's book along with his understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. Regarding his views on the resurrection, the CDF, in sum, declared the following: "The Author's interpretation leads to a position which is incompatible with the Church's doctrine. It is advanced based on erroneous assumptions, and not on the witness of the New Testament, according to which

of his disciples who had loved him and felt he was near. Tried by the world, condemned by authority, buried by the Churches that profess his name, he is rising again, today and tomorrow, in the hearts of men who love him and feel: he is near”²². Gerald O’Collins takes issue with Paul Winter and others like Gordon Kaufman and Rosemary Ruether²³ who according to him alter the essential Easter claim reducing it to the following:

the NT may appear to be speaking about Jesus and his resurrection, but ‘really’ the early Christians were not talking about Jesus himself but merely referring to some event in their own lives, their new life in the Spirit. Their language about the ‘resurrection’ should be decoded that way, and in fact, made no claim about the post-mortem destiny of Jesus.²⁴

To show how widespread the problem is, examples could be given of other theologians who give undue importance to the liberative experience of the disciples to the detriment of the actual resurrection of Jesus. Robert Scuka, for example, does not agree with PHEME PERKINS’ affirmation that only the personal resurrection of Jesus was foundational to the Christian experience of liberation from bondage. Developing his argument in line with James Mackey’s who describes the New Testament proclamation about the resurrection not as a “presumed event in Jesus’ personal destiny” but as a “dual experience of new life in the Spirit and liberation from bondage that is Christian existence²⁵”, Scuka concludes, “we would do better to interpret the Christian affirmation concerning Jesus’ resurrection as a symbolic affirmation that the

the appearances of the Risen Lord and the empty tomb are the foundation of the faith of the disciples in the resurrection of Christ and not vice versa”.

Cf: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20041213_notification-fr-haight_en.html#_ftn1 (21.04.2019).

²² P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, Berlin-New York 1974, p. 208.

²³ Cf. G. O’Collins, *Jesus Risen*, London 1987, p. 103-7, stated in: G. O’Collins., *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, New York 1995, p. 87.

²⁴ O’Collins, *Christology...*, op. cit., p. 87.

²⁵ J. Mackey, *Jesus, The Man and the Myth: A Contemporary Christology*, New York 1979, in: R. Scuka, *Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of a Meaning*, “Modern Theology” 6 (1989) p. 79.

same experience of liberation from bondage and new life that was experienced in and through Jesus' earthly ministry continues to be experienced after his crucifixion."²⁶

Such reductionist understandings of the resurrection form part of the European psyche not because there is a general skepticism about the resurrection but because the resurrection is re-understood in new analogical ways that maintain the idea of the resurrection in a way that does not impact the very core of European thinking and living.

When the early Christians other than the Apostles believed in the resurrection, there was a certainty to it. That certainty may have come about due to miraculous signs or powerful preaching or discovery of personal meaningfulness or through pure grace of the Holy Spirit, but the belief carried with it a certainty that gave a missionary impulse to that certainty. It is this certainty that needs to be engendered in Christians. It is here that the cry of the Fathers of the Church can very well become the missionary cry of the Church: "If you believe you will understand" (Is 7:9) which can be rephrased as "if you believe you will experience".²⁷ This experience may not be identical to that of the Apostles but it could very well be an experience suited most significantly to my personality. We can encounter the Risen One only by following him. "Only if both things are true of us can we bear witness to him and carry his light into this world."²⁸

The truth of the resurrection could also be helpful to people of other religions whether in Europe or elsewhere to perceive and live life more holistically. We know that Judaism and Islam would agree in principle with the truth of the resurrection. Hinduism, however, with its theory of karma and the body being an obstacle to the full liberation of the soul, would not seem in favor of the resurrection. It would, therefore, alienate the Hindus in Europe thus making resurrection

²⁶ R. Scuka, *Resurrection...*, op. cit., p. 85.

²⁷ Isaiah 7:9 is quoted for the famous expression "believe so that you may understand" (*credo ut intelligas*). The original expression in the above mentioned Isaiah text, however, is: "if you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand at all". Augustine is credited for the nuanced usage mentioned above which in turn influenced many patristic writers. For Augustine, if one needs to have knowledge of the things of God, one needs to have faith in the first place. Cf. W. Henn, *One Faith: Biblical and Patristic Contributions Toward Understanding Unity in Faith*, New York 1995, p. 184.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, p. 109.

as the greatest problem that Christian Faith would pose in the mission of the Church to the Hindus in Europe. However, spiritual experiences in some Hindu yogis may perhaps resolve this problematic situation. For example, Paramahansa Yogananda who wrote the book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, explains the encounter with his Guru, Sri Yukteswar, after his death which, nonetheless, differs from the resurrection narratives in the New Testament, presupposes similarities that would certainly uphold the idea of the resurrection. That encounter in chapter 43 was entitled, “The Resurrection of Sri Yukteswar”. To understand various subtleties of the presentation, one needs to read the whole chapter. However, a part of the dialogue between Yogananda and his Guru could be quoted here:

“But is it *you*, Master, the same Lion of God? Are you wearing a body like the one I buried beneath the cruel Puri sands?”
“Yes, my child, I am the same. This is a flesh and blood body. Though I see it as ethereal, to your sight it is physical. From cosmic atoms I created an entirely new body, exactly like the cosmic-dream physical body that you laid beneath dream-sands in Puri in your dream-world. I am in truth resurrected – non on earth but on an astral planet. Its inhabitants are better able than earthly humanity to meet my lofty standards. There you and your exalted loved ones shall someday come to be with me.”²⁹

Before leaving Yogananda, the Guru gave a kind of a mandate to him to tell others about this resurrection. “I have now told you, Yogananda, the truths of my life, death, and resurrection. Grieve not for me; rather broadcast everywhere the story of my resurrection from the God-dreamed earth of men to another God-dreamed planet of astrally garbed souls! New hope will be infused into the hearts of misery-mad, death-fearing dreamers of the world”.³⁰

Here, we need not get into differences of the resurrection in Jesus and Guru Yuktेशwar to prove whose resurrection is authentic or historical. The point here is that the resurrection, one of the central tenets of the Christian Faith as the content of missionary proclamation especially in today’s scenario,

²⁹ P. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Bombay 1980, p. 408.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

could be helpful not only for Christians to live holistic lives but also for the mission of the Church in its interreligious interactions with religions where the reality of the resurrection is acceptable thereby favoring a common platform for an enriching theological dialogue.

The Incarnation

The incarnation is another reality of the Christian Faith that needs to be revisited with a missionary commitment. It is through the incarnation that humanity has something fascinating to reflect upon to lead it into profound divine-human awareness. It is this greatness that needs to be propagated to the European mind once again to reinforce or rather infuse a different paradigm of thinking and living. However, just like the resurrection, problematic understandings are taking their toll on the Christian reality of the incarnation as well which creates another missionary situation where the right understanding of the incarnation needs to be upheld.

The misunderstandings of the incarnation can be noticed in the following theories or ideas of the incarnation. The fundamental trend of these ideas is that the incarnation need not be considered as a unique event that happened in the history of humanity through the person of Jesus Christ. Incarnation is a possibility open to all human beings because we have the divine potential within us. We indeed have the divine potential, on which we shall be reflecting a bit more later, but the way these authors present their ideas puts into question the doctrine of the incarnation of the Christian Faith. We need, therefore, to analyze briefly the un-doctrinal yet attractive perspectives of these authors whom we could consider as representatives of all the other authors who endorse such perspectives in diverse ways.

The idea of the incarnation more than being exclusively applicable to the person of Jesus Christ is inclusive of a universal rational phenomenon in all human beings according to Hegel. For Hegel, God incarnates in human thinking in and through which the human being can be considered as the presence of the divine essence (God)³¹. Jesus himself incarnated God's presence

³¹ Cf. D.P. Jamros, *Hegel on the Incarnation*, "Theological Studies" 56 (1995) p. 276-300, 277. "For Hegel God is not a transcendent creator but the substance or essence of the universe".

in this way. Hence the incarnation is turned into a rational truth rather than a supernatural mystery³².

Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949 presents the fundamental idea which I think would be considered commonplace today whether in Europe or elsewhere that beneath the myths, stories or legends of every religion and culture lies the archetypal reality which would be common to all “heroes” or founders of religions like Gautama Buddha, Mohammed, and Jesus. These stories, therefore, are only projections of that reality. The historical differences are glossed over in treating these great personalities. Campbell is strongly influenced by Freud and Jung and the discoveries of psychoanalytic science.³³ In this sense, the incarnation is the projection of a human myth in need of a psychological hermeneutic. O’Collins rightly summarizes Campbell’s study in this regard stating that Campbell

found a single pattern underlying various myths and legends of humanity: ‘the hero as the incarnation of God is himself the navel of the world, the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time’. The archetypal hero directs each of us to our ‘immanent divinity’. The ‘divine being’ reveals ‘the omnipotent Self, which dwells within us all’. The lesson for everyone is: ‘Know this and be God’.³⁴

On the one hand, the conclusions of Campbell sound interesting and liberating because it would help us to realize “the inexhaustible and multifariously wonderful divine existence that is the life in all of us”.³⁵ While on the other, it destroys the unique claim of Christ’s incarnation that Jesus Christ is fully God demoting it to a projection of the myth of God coming in this world which is shared by some religions. The implication is that the absolute historical veracity of the incarnation cannot and should not be rigidly maintained. Following in a similar vein where the common denominator in all of us is the divine that is incarnated in all of us. John Hick sees Jesus Christ

³² Ibid., p. 277.

³³ Cf. J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, London 1993, p. 4.

³⁴ G. O’Collins, *Incarnation*, London 2002, p. 7.

³⁵ J. Campbell, op. cit., p. 391.

as responding to that divine presence in the fullest way possible and thereby incarnating it or fleshing it out fully through his own life³⁶. Thus for Hick, “The idea of the incarnation of God in the life of Jesus, so understood, is thus not a metaphysical claim about Jesus having two natures, but a metaphorical statement of the significance of a life through which God was acting on earth. In Jesus we see a man living in a startling degree of awareness of God and of response to God’s presence”³⁷.

From the perspectives of the above authors, it becomes evident that the doctrinal meaning of the incarnation is reduced to a human category where the unique, historical, and real incarnation of God in Jesus Christ slowly pales into insignificance. No doubt, that the idea of the incarnation proposed by these authors becomes useful for a thinking that could prove attractive but it cannot substitute the real incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the perspectives of some of the authors betray an idea of God who is unable to incarnate fully.

For now, however, looking at the problematic that the authors’ reflections pose, we could affirm that there are European Christians who have, are, and still accepting the thinking of these authors and that is where our role as missio-theologians needs to be put into action. The thinking of these authors could be accepted since it implies the divinity of humanity but not to the extent that it disregards the real incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. A divine element beyond Jesus Christ is presupposed that needs to be attuned to for arriving at divinity. All the authors presume a divinity outside humans which incarnates in humans thereby making them divine: For Hegel God incarnated in human thinking. For Campbell, the incarnate one is he who through whom the energies of the eternity break into time (like in Buddha and Mohammed). For Hick incarnation meant embodying a highly religious quality. These authors could not have arrived at a divine anthropology if it was not for the real incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is only in the incarnation of Jesus Christ that the divinity of humanity is perceived.³⁸ We do have the creation account that

³⁶ Cf. J. Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, London 1993, p. 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁸ There could be an objection here because in Hinduism as well there is the concept of the divine incarnation (Avatārs). But in Hinduism, the divine incarnations supposedly masquerade in creaturely forms. In this case, God becomes a creature for a certain mission.

gives us verbal knowledge of the divinity of human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). But it is only in Jesus Christ that the knowledge is historically ratified. We are therefore really human and divine. If this reality is realized in Jesus Christ then the truthfulness of ourselves is only revealed in Jesus Christ. Divinity is therefore an intrinsic part of humanity and not some kind of an element from outside as the above authors imply. Jesus Christ does not take on a human body instead becomes human, and if humanity was not divine, incarnation could never have happened. The European mind today needs to realize that the greatness of the human vocation lies in its divine nature (cf. *Gaudium et spes* 22). The reality of the incarnation needs to be revisited to heighten the vocation of the human being to finally lead human beings to live responsibly and freely in total love and self-giving because the divine nature could be manifested in total self-giving love which is revealed in Jesus Christ and therefore Jesus becomes the actual model to be followed. Christian missionaries need to seriously get involved in the proclamation of the incarnation with more eagerness and vigor to help Christians and non-Christians to realize their divine nature.

Christian Faith and Testimony – God or Jesus Christ?

The Apostles do not proclaim God, they proclaim Jesus Christ. By saying this, we are not affirming that God is not involved in the primary apostolic proclamation because the word “God” is used many times in the Acts of the Apostles but evidently in the context of the Christ event. It is, however, interesting to note that at the very beginning of Acts, the witnessing that is commanded of the Apostles is of Christ and his resurrection: Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:22 – “For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” As we continue reading the book of Acts, and the Apostolic

Once the mission is over God returns to his abode giving up the creaturely body. Firstly, therefore, God is not fully undergoing incarnation in Hinduism as in the Christian sense so the real divinity of the creaturely body cannot be ascertained. Secondly, the Avatār stories are myths and cannot be historically confirmed. Whereas the incarnation of Jesus is considered as a historical fact because Jesus was a historical person.

epistles, we find that the God that is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit is the Son of God implying the Father. Many passages could be found in the epistles where God's activity is perceived in Jesus Christ but this God is not considered as an entity in itself separated from Jesus Christ who uses him as an instrument or a prophet like in the Old Testament. The intrinsic or genetic connection that is perceived between Jesus Christ and God as the Son of God and God the Father respectively is a perception that is not imagined or concocted by the Apostles because it was historically noticed by them in quite a few ways. It was therefore in Jesus Christ that God was proclaimed; rather a Triune God was proclaimed that is unparalleled in any other divine testimony. Major non-Christian religions³⁹ do talk of God or a Divine Reality or a Principle etc. which needs to be followed through the way taught by the founder of that religion. But Christian testimony is centered on Jesus Christ as God who rose from the dead. This dynamic needs to be placed in comparison to the teachings of other major religions spreading in Europe. The point that needs to be borne in mind is that teachings about God or on God offered either philosophically, spiritually, or historically, always existed before and even after the Christ event. The offer of liberation, heaven, final fulfillment, etc., are made to humankind. God is an essential element of human discourse. To proclaim that kind of God would be to state the obvious. In the Apostles' case, most especially, if God (Yahweh) was proclaimed, it would have made their lives easier. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders, and others would have welcomed such proclamation with open hands. It is only when Yahweh is presumed as the Father (Abba) of Jesus of Nazareth who is proclaimed as the Son of God risen from the dead, that the proclamation becomes disturbing and unacceptable to the Jews and subsequently to all those who preach God or ways to God. It is here that the Christ-event becomes a decisive event in human history whose veracity lies in the acknowledgment of the Apostles who had seen, heard, and touched God in Jesus Christ. It was as though the whole God was mysteriously present in human form, which to some would be impossible given their human or philosophical perceptions of God. This, furthermore, promises the truth of the information received about God. If claims to truth are made by other religions then the criteria for truth on any God information must take into consideration the source of that information. We cannot be certain about the

³⁹ By major non-Christian religions we mean, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam.

truth of the Divine information if it comes from a non-Divine principle. The certainty of Divine information which is attested in Jesus Christ because he is God cannot be attested in the same way with other founders of religions who were human beings. This does not mean that Divine knowledge is absent in the information provided to us by the founders of other religions.⁴⁰ But there is a considerable difference in the two: the Christian founder is claimed to be God while the other founders claim to be mediums of God or a Supernatural Reality, and it is this difference that guarantees the surpassing absolute truth of the Christian proclamation. At the intellectual level, it is the above understanding of the truth of the Christian proclamation that needs to enthuse us to bring back to the Church European Catholics who have left the Church for other spiritualities or religions in the hope of experiencing God.

Christian Faith and “divine” experience

Europeans today are seeking spiritual experiences that some of them would like to call either “divine” experience or “God” experience. We are not sure of a general criterion to judge a spiritual experience as a genuine God experience. The general criterion happens to be a sentiment of serenity, harmony, compassion, and meaningfulness. But these sentiments or feelings, respectful in themselves, need not determine a God experience in the Christian sense of the term because God in Christianity is personal, rather tri-personal. But the divine experience that modern spirituality promises, in more ways than one, appears to convey a God concept that is beyond the personal – at times impersonal and at times transpersonal.⁴¹ Going beyond the personal categories

⁴⁰ In the case of classical Buddhism, even though God is not acknowledged, divine knowledge could be understood as knowledge for Nirvaṇa. There is no admission here of a personal divine principle but there is acceptance of *Dhamma* – an impersonal principle like the cosmic law and order which is immanent and transcendent to all reality.

⁴¹ Cf. S. Painadath, *Spiritual Encounter of East and West. The Interpersonal and the Transpersonal Streams of Spirituality*, in: *Jesuits in Dialogue: Toward a Theology of Interreligious Dialogue*, Rome 2003, p. 9; J. Lipner, *Śamkara on Metaphor*, in: R.W. Perret (ed.), *Indian Philosophy of Religion*, Dordrecht 1989, p. 169, no. 9, quoted in: B.J. Malkovsky, *Life and work of Richard V. De Smet, S.J.*, in: *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedānta*, 14-15, footnote., p. 28. For a discussion on how the “transpersonal” is not a good substitution for the “personal” and the “impersonal”,

gives the impression of avoiding the anthropomorphic categories leading us to a category that is “higher” and perhaps closer to the divine mystery. Some Hindu masters have downplayed the “personal” hermeneutic of God calling it a lower-level concept of God. In *Advaita* Hinduism, a philosophy that is widely spread through the Eastern spirituality marketed in Europe, the personal concept of God is taken as a lower-level concept because it belongs to the *Saguna Brahman* where God is seen in contact with his creation and therefore conceived in personal terms. The higher concept of God belongs to the *Nirguna Brahman* where the absolute God is conceived in an apophatic way, rather in an impersonal way – in a “not this, not that” way to show that the true or absolute God is beyond all human categories. It is this God that one needs to get attuned to for final liberation. Within such a hermeneutic, it can come as no surprise that Hindu masters like Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan have criticized the personal concept of God as a lower concept of God attacking thereby the Christian concept of God and being quite successful in the West with their proclamation. Vivekananda is quoted to have said, “The highest ideal in our scriptures is the impersonal and would to God every one of us here were high enough to realise that impersonal ideal.”⁴² “Radhakrishnan maintains that understanding God as personal does not fully satisfy our religious needs. Therefore the worship of the Absolute is higher than that of a personal God.”⁴³ Some authors have critiqued the “impersonal” concept of God as an unfortunate translation of the word “Nirguna”.⁴⁴ But what we notice here is a conflict of God-concepts to highlight and affirm the “non-personal” concept of the Hindu God of *Advaita* Vedanta as a concept to be preached and practiced against the “personal” concept of the Christian God. The problem becomes more acute when Christianity does not stop at the “personal” God but moves on to preach a “tripersonal” God.

see B. Lobo, *Tripersonalising the Hindu God of Advaita Vedānta – Parabrahman*, “Gregorianum” 92 (2011) no. 1, p. 159-182, footnote, p. 38.

⁴² In S. Anand, *Hindu Reflections for Christian Reflections*, Anand 2004, p. 10-11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, the founding father of Indian Christian theology, finds the translation of Nirguna as impersonal to be unfortunate because according to him guna in Sanskrit means a rope or a tie and therefore nirguna means tie-less signifying the attributelessness of God to show God’s highest perfection in not being related to any created reality. For a discussion of this aspect see B. Lobo, *op. cit.*, p. 166-169.

The divine experience that we were talking of earlier in this section, and that is promised to the European who practices the spiritual exercises of the East, in our case, Advaita Hinduism, presupposes a “non-personal” idea of God. In this way, the Christian God will have to be relegated to the background. To avoid such unfortunate conclusions, the Christian Faith must be propagated vis-à-vis the apophatic paradigm of the spiritual experience. The apophatic experience of God is not absent in Christian spirituality. In the *nada nada* expression of the Spanish mystics, we could see the *neti neti* of the Upanishads, the foundational scripture of Advaita spirituality. We have Christian apophaticism that goes beyond the anthropomorphic categories of expressing the divine experience without downgrading the personal categories of the divine. Saints like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross in their heights of impersonal mystical experience did not downplay the Christian Faith in the tripersonal God. In fact, the tripersonal God shines in a more profound light through their deep experience of God in Jesus Christ. In the Christian Faith, there is no conflict between the personal and impersonal paradigms of God. However, for our missionary purposes, we cannot deny that we have been a bit slack in furthering the apophatic mysticism which may be the need of the hour. Such a mysticism cannot be propagated at the expense of the personal hermeneutic of God. We may know that the term “person” has become problematic when used for the three beings in God because “person” would mean an individual consciousness and the Trinitarian God cannot have three separate consciousnesses but one consciousness because the Trinity is one God implying one divine consciousness shared by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit each in his own proper way.⁴⁵ We cannot enter into the theological debate of this issue here but in our missionary endeavor in this regard, we need to promote the Christian experience of God that would have to take the dimension of mysticism seriously. Such kind of promotion could help the diffusion of mysticism in Christian spirituality even among the common Christians to go beyond the elite status it has acquired in the past. We need to summon the mystical element in our Faith communication to help Catholics today to arrive at an understanding that at times needs to go beyond rationality.

Mysticism is an activity that can lead to an enlightening of the Faith and thereby to a supra-rational understanding of the Faith. This kind of an

⁴⁵ Cf. K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, trs., J. Donceel, London 1975, p. 107.

understanding need not be reserved for a select few like some of the great saints, as mentioned before like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, or mystics like Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, Denys the Carthusian, and others. The proposal of mysticism stands as an invitation to all Catholics, but most especially to those who leave the Church under the pretext of not finding significance in the liturgical activities of the Church, who are seeking spiritual renewal but are not able to find it in their Catholic Faith and therefore are attracted to Oriental religions and the meditations taught there. The common Catholic in Europe must be initiated into mysticism which may seem like an exaggerated evangelizing impulse on the part of the pastors precisely due to the glorified aura created around this reality in the past. But it need not be so. Taking our cue from Rahner, we could perceive mysticism as a natural component of a human being's existence. Rahner states: "in every human person ... there is something like an anonymous, unthematic, perhaps repressed, basic experience of being oriented to God ... which can be repressed but not destroyed, which is 'mystical'... has its climax in what the classical masters called infused contemplation"⁴⁶. Rahner also believes that it is this mystical component that forms part even of Christianity. We cannot get into the details of Rahner's mysticism here, but in brief, it would be helpful to note that mysticism stands at the very heart of Rahner's anthropology since the self-communication of God to every person is the offer of God's own self which makes the person a *homo mysticus* (mystical man)⁴⁷. It is the *homo mysticus* that needs to be revived in the practice of Christian Faith that will, in effect, keep the Christian Faith alive and significant. It is in such living Faith (faith) that certainty is acquired leading the devotee not to the acceptance of an impersonal supernatural power more or less proclaimed by followers of the New Age spirituality, but to an intimate relationship and knowledge of a Personal rather a Tri-personal God. One of the topics for mission in Europe could very well be an invitation to mysticism, an invitation to contemplate or meditate

⁴⁶ K. Rahner, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Church*, in: *The Great Church Year*, A. Raffelt, H.D. Egan, (eds.), New York 1993, p. 362-363; H.D. Egan, *The mystical theology of Karl Rahner*, "The Way" 52 (2013) no. 2, p. 44.

⁴⁷ This term was used by Harvey D. Egan in his article cited above "The mystical theology of Karl Rahner" on page 43. Egan states: "Because God offers nothing less than God's very own self to everyone, the human person is, to Rahner's way of thinking, *homo mysticus*, mystical man".

on the Faith, a central characteristic of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises that revitalized the Faith life of Europe in the medieval times. The same Exercises, perhaps revised to suit contemporary Catholics, need to be offered regularly to every Catholic before he or she abandons the Church to find recourse in non-Christian contemplation and meditation. In furthering this mysticism the common Catholic will be, furthermore, helped to recognize more concretely the “mysticism of daily life” as Rahner professes, a mysticism that spiritualizes the everyday “ordinary” and “banal” events of life as graced events because “grace has its history in man’s day-to-day existence with its splendors and failures and is actually experienced there”⁴⁸. It is in these experiences that the Spirit of God is at work. It is this Spirit that needs to enthuse the proclamation of the Christian Faith in Europe. *Vis-à-vis* the rational foundations of the Faith we need today renewed foundations in the Spirit. We need a *Fides et Ratio et Spiritus*.

Christian Faith – love – Spirituality

Coming to the final section of our presentation with the “spiritus” dimension evidenced above, I would rather state that the end could very well be the beginning. Before we even start reflecting on certain chosen elements of the Christian Faith for our missionary task, we need to talk about love because even before reason came to the rescue of the Faith in the history of the Church, it was the foundation of love that helped the missionary growth of the Christian Faith. It was the self-giving love of Jesus – “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” – that preceded the Christian dogmas. If the Christian Faith does not have love, then it is a “noisy gong and clanging cymbal”. Faith and love have to go hand in hand. However, some missionaries feel that love is enough. Jesus wanted love and we created the dogmas and started fighting over them. The European Christians are perhaps weary of the dogmas. What they want is pure love, plain and simple, uncontaminated by the Faith. They find Faith exclusive and even egoistic but love is perceived as all-inclusive and divine. The slogan, therefore, is God is love and love is God. But love in itself cannot be God. When love is absolutized in this way, it loses its direction. Love

⁴⁸ K. Rahner, *On the Theology of Worship*, in: *Theological Investigations*, vol. 19, trs. E. Quinn, London 1984, p. 147.

can turn into self-seeking and hedonism. Europe has become a living example of such kind of love. Christians are reveling in this kind of an epicurean love that finally alienates a person from oneself. The reasons for love need to be re-reasoned under the light of the Christian Faith because it is within the Faith perspectives that the European Christian needs to live, move and have his/her being for a holistic and integrated life. Faith offers perspectives that renew and revitalize the human person.

Along with the love argument, there are Christians who would rather call themselves spiritual and not religious. They practice a certain kind of agnosticism concerning the Christian Faith. They know the Christian Faith but are not fully convinced by its claims. They always remain skeptical of the Christian Faith. They do not involve themselves in the Church life, in the sacraments, or the study of the Faith because they do not gain anything from such practices. They may practice charity and even love for the poor and the downtrodden but they find Christianity meaningless. They are more attracted to classical Buddhism, Zen or other kinds of Asian spiritualities which speak more of a supernatural impersonal principle as stated above that liberates human beings and not a personal God who converses with human beings. The Bible then represents to them an anthropomorphic expression of the Divine encountering humans which in itself is good but needs to be transcended because truth according to them, which goes beyond to touch the mystery of the divine, cannot be shackled within such anthropomorphic perspectives. Many Christians, therefore, believe in the divine but not in the God of the Bible. To such Christians then, the Christian Faith needs to be proclaimed with renewed insights and praxis that would lead them to a more meaningful spirituality and thereby a more meaningful existence.

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The Pastoral Mission of the Churches in Europe Towards Contextualized and Participative Christian Communities

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*If you want to change people's conduct, you need to challenge their
imagination.*¹

Paul Ricoeur

Introduction

My presentation intends to show how the local churches (dioceses) in European countries like France, Italy and Germany are looking for new ways to face the crisis of parishes. To live out their pastoral mission and ministry in a time of transition and crisis depends to a great extent on encouraging lively Christian communities where the baptized Christians are receiving formation and where they are nurtured to carry out their mission in the Church and in the secular and plural society around them. “The millennium-old institution of the parish, as the most common Christian community, has undergone various stages of crisis and transformation since the time of industrialization and urbanization,

¹ Paul Ricoeur quoted by John M. Prior, *Insights from Eco-Theology*, in Lazar, S. Thanuzraj, N. Thanh (eds.), *SVD Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts*, Siegburg 2018, p. 176; cf. S. Bevans, K. Tahaafe-Williams, *Contextual Theologies for the Twenty-First Century*, Eugene, Oregon 2011, p. 43.

especially in the churches of the Western World” in an increasingly secular, individualistic and plural society, where religion is more and more restricted to the private sphere of life.²

We are today in a state of social upheaval. “What is at stake is the inner cohesiveness of the Catholic Church and, indeed, of all Christian denominations. Europe’s Christian milieu has largely dissolved and has given way to a vague kind of believing fellowship. The great social framework has been secularized, no longer holding fast to any particular Christian belief, but becoming liberalized and focused on the individual. Church authority is no longer considered to be subject to the critical judgment of believers. While the democratic-liberal state does not directly interfere with Church affairs, it does provide parameters for pluralistic thinking. The consequence of this is a steady loss of church membership, a mental alienation from church customs and regulations, an increasingly anti-church or ecclesiastically indifferent public and often frightening ignorance of the faith in the younger generations.”³

The French theologian Bernard Ugeux gives us in his analysis on European Post-Enlightenment societies an interesting insight: “It has been said often enough: The West, whose level of development is envied by others, is experiencing an ever-increasing feeling of vulnerability. This is linked to the acceleration of societal and technological change and the ensuing ethical questions; to the increasingly complex nature of economic, political and scientific problems encountered; to the cultural and religious diversity of the West that some people find threatening to their own identity; to the deregulation of institutions such as church, state or education; to the inability of society to offer a collective project other than the valorization of progress as understood by the mentality of the market.”⁴

The same author treats the critique of relevant parts of modern society on the Christian faith as represented and practiced by the churches: “Many of those

² P.B. Steffen, *Nurturing Human and Christian Communities*, in: Lazar, S. Thanuzraj, op. cit., p. 318; cf. P.B. Steffen, *Practical Missiology or Practical Theology with Missionary Perspective? The Transformation of Missiology before and after Vatican II*, “Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest” 35 (2017) no. 2, p. 146-160.

³ J. Piepke, *Arnold Janssen – An Inspiration for today*, “Verbum SVD” 59 (2018) no. 3, p. 307.

⁴ B. Ugeux, *Questions which new spiritualities pose to evangelization in Europe*, “International Review of Mission”, 95 (2006) no. 378/379 (July/October), p. 328.

who are searching for meaning often have an axe to grind with Judeo-Christianity, in particular with the institutional church. They are more open to the spiritualities or therapies proposed by the New Age movement or to traditions that come from the Far-East. They also sometimes tend to be aggressive towards Christianity, criticizing it as too dogmatic, moralistic, as having disdain for both the physical and emotional life, to prescriptive in the way believers have to take, and too great a distance between the official discourse of the church and believers real lives. Whether or not these criticisms are justified, they have to be heard.”⁵ Then B. Ugeux raises the question that really matters: “Why do all these people go elsewhere?” Why do they feel disappointed and suspicious towards Christianity (especially when they are in the midst of difficulties)?”

The Christians and churches in Western society and their theologians, pastors and leaders cannot avoid to find the reasons for being disappointed and suspicious on Western Christianity and they have to admit that all criticism, even if is exaggerated and too general, it always contains some truth. For Ugeux one answer at least for certain parts of modern secular and plural society is: “they do so because they reject the fruits of Enlightenment and prefer the irrational, pleasure, emotion, initiation, Gnosticism rather than truth, rationality, freedom or progress.”⁶

The impact of secularization and individualization on Christian communities

In my reflection there “is not just one way of understanding religious and secular perceptions of the world and of relating them to one another. Each context involves a unique situation in which a religious or secular life can be led. There are innumerable opportunities for interaction between them. How they relate to each other depends on the prevailing forces in the respective cultural and political situation. From my own pastoral theological and missiological perspective it is important to respond to the needs of the religious community, as this is the only way to understand the religious and secular context in the society concerned. It is very important to know and respect the way in which

⁵ Ibid., p. 325.

⁶ Ibid.

the respective religious community and secular society see themselves.”⁷ The question is: “How can comparative contextual pastoral theology and missiology provide believers and Christian communities with guidelines enabling them to play their role more effectively in a secular, pluralistic society? Christians and Christian communities today need encouragement and hope to perform with renewed vigour and confidence the task assigned to them by their risen Lord – to spread the Good News.”⁸ The churches in European countries are a part of secular and plural societies which influence all members of those societies in- and outside the Church.

“The concept of *secularization* is one of the main categories necessary to understand the contemporary era. ... In particular, secularization is given three meanings: a) the idea of biblical-Christian inspiration, of religious less sacral and more attentive to the day-to-day affairs; b) a cultural phenomenon characterized by human autonomy; c) a principle that favours non-interference of religion in ethics and politics. On the *theorem of secularization* takes on different types: 1) secularization as the decline of religion; 2) secularization as de-sacralization of the world; 3) secularization as disengagement of society from religion; 4) secularization as a migration of beliefs and behavioural models from the religious sphere to the of the secular one. [...] Christian theology suggests a different interpretation of secularization, intended as a religious view of the world and of life. This interpretation is different compared to other religions and cultures which seem to favour the juridical and moral side, the sacred to remain anonymous and the rites to be a condition of belonging. By virtue of *Incarnation*, Christianity brings about a crisis in the theistic and metaphysical unconscious, showing the tangibility of a God-for-man, in view of a liberating solidarity. The secular dimension of Christianity makes it a religion that seeks freedom and justice for all, and which creates a culture of acknowledgment of others in their being others.”⁹

Christian communities in the Western World are in the midst of a highly secular culture where “Religious belief is perceived as a threat to the affirmation

⁷ P.B. Steffen, *Evangelizing Ministry in a Secular Context*, in: K. Krämer, K. Vellguth (eds.), *The Universal Church in Germany*, (One World Theology – 6), Quezon City, Phil., 2015, p. 96.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹ C. Dotolo, *Secularism/Secularization*, in: B. Kanakappally et al. (eds.), *Hindu-Christian Dictionary. Essential Terms for Inter-religious Dialogue*, Mumbai, 2017, p. 221-222.

of human autonomy and the ability of human beings to accept full responsibility for the course of history; dependence on God to solve social problems prevents humanity from fully realizing its potential for self-liberation. At best, religious faith is privatized, relegated to the realm of the individual person's private conscience, but effectively excluded from the public sphere."¹⁰

The pastoral mission of the Church depends first of all on the places where it is present and alive in various types of Christian communities, among which the millennium old institution of the parish still remains for most Christians the Christian community they are most familiar with. But for up to 90 % of the officially registered baptized Christians their relationship to the parish has weakened in the years since Vatican II (1965). For the majority of Christians the parish is no longer a binding force and a place of Christian formation; they reduce their contact to the parish to a minimum. Most of those faithfully distant Catholics, as they are often referred to, are not even members of other types of Christian community, which leads with the passing of time to a weakening of their Christian identity. The number of people leaving the Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany and other Western countries every year remains high, especially in the 15 to 44 years age group. According to statisticians this trend will continue in the coming years. At the moment both churches still make up 54.2 % of the population in Germany,

¹⁰ „Secularism. The term refers to the modern ideology emphasizing the autonomy of the human order, thereby denying the existence of a supernatural dimension in human history. This leads to a suspicion of and indeed, an antipathy toward religion. ... (for example, politics, economics) and precluded from having an explicit, overt impact in the public, social order. The public, secularized, social order is perceived as organized around rational principles, while religion is perceived as based on “irrational” faith. Consequently, the ideology of secularism is closely linked to the equally modern ideology of rationalism. If religious belief impedes human liberation in history, religion is an “irrational” response to human problems that can only be solved through the unimpeded exercise of our human rational capacities. Likewise, once the possibility of a supernatural or spiritual dimension of history is rejected, so too is the possibility of divine revelation as a source of human knowledge. ... Spiritual, religious, and ethical criteria are excluded as measures of social advancement and human happiness since these are assumed to be purely “subjective” matters of private conscience or individual taste. Consequently, the theocentric worldview of medieval Christianity gives way, in secularist ideology, to a thoroughly anthropocentric worldview, where the human being is the centre of his or her universe.“, R.S. Goizueta, *Secularism*, in: O.O. Espín, J.B. Nickoloff (eds.), *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, Dublin 2007, p. 1244-1245.

but in a few years they will be having less than half of the population of the Federal Republic of Germany as their members.¹¹ According to East German philosopher Eberhard Tiefensee, the time of the popular church (*Volkskirche*) in Western Europe is over. It will become the exception, he prophesies. And Christians would be largely in a diaspora situation. In addition, the Church must receive impetus from the world and change. “Then there is the question of women, the question of the position of the priest, the bishop, the pope. These things are in a state of upheaval and, of course, cause uncertainty.” Even language and liturgy would inevitably change, Tiefensee is convinced.¹²

There is no doubt that the institution of the parish is in the midst of a crisis. Its very social form of being a congregation of baptized Christians under the pastoral care of a priest is threatened. A look at the ordinary worshipping assemblies which attend the Sunday liturgy reveals that the faithful remnant of parishioners is mainly over sixty and grey haired.

The bishop of Trier diocese in Germany is planning to make out of the more than 900 parishes only 35 in the year 2020. He explained recently in an interview: “We need to rethink the parish in the sense that a parish can be lived in different places within the parish. Let us remember the words of Pope Francis that a parish can take very different forms (*Evangelii Gaudium* 28). If some say that they are losing their feeling of being at home (*Heimat*) in the parish of the future, we must realize that most Catholics today have no connection to their parish. The impression that the parish was close to the people so far, but the parishes of the future are creating alienation, is not true. Most, especially young people, have nothing to do with the parish in its traditional

¹¹ „Und da blieben die beiden großen Kirchen zusammen auch im vergangenen Jahr im Verhältnis ihres Anteils zur Gesamtbevölkerung von 82,7 Millionen über der 50-Prozent-Marke. Das geht aus den am Freitag vorgelegten Statistiken der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) hervor. Bundesweit hatte die katholische Kirche 2017 demnach rund 23,3 Millionen Mitglieder, was 28,2 Prozent der Gesamtbevölkerung entspricht. Die EKD bezifferte die Zahl ihrer Mitglieder in den 20 Landeskirchen auf 21,5 Millionen, ein Anteil von etwa 26 Prozent.“, J. Heinz in KNA, 27.07.2018, found in : <https://www.domradio.de/themen/bischofskonferenz/2018-07-21/katholiken-und-protestanten-veroeffentlichen-statistik-fuer-2017> (30.07.2018).

¹² *Religionsphilosoph sieht die Zeit der Volkskirche beendet*, KNA, 26.07.2018, in: <https://www.domradio.de/themen/glaube/2018-07-26/religionsphilosoph-sieht-die-zeit-der-volkskirche-beendet>

form.”¹³ For Bishop Ackermann the self-centredness of the traditional parishes is hindering its pastoral ministry from reaching out to the distant Catholics. “Many committed people who carry the parish life are self-sufficient. The Erfurt Pastoral theologian Maria Widl once described these persons as follows: “They regard the parish as their common living room. There are groups in parishes that are so rigid, structurally and mentally, that they have a deterrent effect on people who do not belong to the ‘inner circle’. This is devastating for the missionary task. There is an indoor operation going on that cannot be turned off. People are not doing bad things, but what about the other 92 per cent of church members? Do you have a chance to find somewhere more easily accessible offers? More air is needed in the system.”¹⁴

Ackermann admits: “We are in a crisis. There’s nothing for me to gloss over. But there is no doubt for me that it’s not only in our place that the Church is going through a critical phase.”¹⁵

The ecumenical missiologist David Bosch helps us to understand what a crisis situation means for the mission of the church: “It is, rather, normal for Christians to live in a situation of crisis. It should never have been different.” Bosch quotes the Dutch theologian to explain this further: “Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.’ This ought to be the case, Kraemer argued, because of the abiding tension between (the Church’s) essential nature and its empirical condition.” Why is it, then, that we are so seldom aware of this element of crisis and tension in the Church? Because, Kraemer adds, the Church “has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission”. And for

¹³ S. Ackermann quoted from „Pfarrei mit Zukunft.“ Thema der Woche, in Die Tagespost, 12. Juli 2018, p. 2. – The diocese of Trier plans for 35 parishes in the future. Bishop Stephan Ackermann will formally erect them in early 2020. The model is controversial and created a huge discussion among the faithful as parish members and pastoral workers. This plan was preceded by a diocesan synod which took place from 13 December 2013 to 30 April 2016. The result of the synod was formulated in the synod document „heraus gerufen – Schritte in die Zukunft wagen“ (called forth – steps into the future). See: <https://bistum-trier.aufwind-solutions.de/assets/adb/48/48bf71119beddabb.pdf> (05.08.2018).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid..

many centuries the church has suffered very little and has been led to believe that it is a success.”¹⁶

Not to face a crisis is really dangerous for the Church. “And if the atmosphere of crisislessness still lingers on in many parts of the West, this is simply the result of a dangerous delusion.” And he continues: “Let us also know that to encounter the crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the *church*.”¹⁷ Indeed, the final positive opportunity Bosch sees for the Church as a whole can be applied to the local church and the parish particularly: “The Japanese character for ‘crisis’ is a combination of the characters for ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity’ (or ‘promise’); crisis is therefore not the end of opportunity but in reality only its beginning, the point where danger and opportunity meet, where the future is in the balance and where events can go either way.”¹⁸

Overview of the history of the parish and other types of Christian associations

All the Christian churches have inherited a parish model as the dominant congregation model at the local level to nourish and live the Christian faith of its followers. This model goes back to the time Christianity became the dominant and favoured religion in the late fourth century in the Roman Empire. Charlemagne gave the parish not only a religious and spiritual function in his empire but also an educational, moral and administrative function.

The reformation in the 16th century caused the development of the typical Protestant parish and the Council of Trent had finally an impact on the typical Catholic parish.

But even in mediaeval times the parish conducted by secular clergy did not keep a monopoly on exercising the pastoral ministries to the lay faithful. The churches run by various orders attracted a lot of people since they offered a possibility to select between different pastoral approaches performed by

¹⁶ D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, New York 1991, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

secular and religious clergy. Another way to be committed as a Christian beyond what a usual parish offered was made available by various Confraternities. The religious orders and congregations had always been an alternative and distinct way to live a life totally committed to follow Jesus Christ and his Gospel.¹⁹

At the time of industrialization (19th and 20th century) the need to offer to the lay people new ways and places of receiving Christian formation and being engaged in the struggles of life, which the new era had brought about, was felt and, thanks be to God, there were people who recognized the signs of the times by developing new ways of lay participation for those classes of society otherwise left alone with their problems: the artisans and workers. The diocesan priest Adolf Kolping (1813-1865) was such a man. In 1849 he founded an association which offered to workers all over the German-speaking countries in Middle Europe, a home and a place of human and Christian formation which respected and strengthened the human dignity of Christian workers.

The Kolping Association was organized according to ecclesiastical structures; that means according to dioceses and parishes. Since the parish priest had always the function of being the president of the Kolping Association, and its spiritual leader and supporter, any conflict with the parish ministry was avoided and a ministry the parish was not prepared to take up was developed and made available within the structures of the church on diocesan and parish levels.

In 1919 the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967) founded a social movement to help young Catholic workers; in 1924 it got the name Young Christian Workers (YCW).²⁰ YCW is recognized as a Catholic organization of and for the youth; it is spread over fifty countries worldwide and sees itself as a part of the worldwide workers movement. Its threefold pedagogical approach "See, Judge and Act" has not only influenced the formation of its members, but was adopted in the post-councilar period by the Bishops Conferences of Latin America (CELAM) and in practical and contextual theology worldwide.

¹⁹ C. Floristán, *Para comprender la parroquia*, Estella 2001, Id., *Para comprender la Evangelización*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 1993; Id., *Teología Práctica. Teoría y praxis de la acción pastoral*, Salamanca 1998; V. Bo, *Storia della parrocchia*, vol. 1, *I secoli delle origini (sec. IV-V)*; vol. 2, *I secoli dell'infanzia (sec. VI-XI)*; vol. 3, *Il travaglio della crescita (sec. XII-XIV)*; vol. 4, *Il superamento della crisi (sec. XV-XVI)*, vol. 5, *La parrocchia tridentina*; Bologna 2004.

²⁰ in French: Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne (JOC), cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Christian_Workers (11.06.2020).

More Catholic lay movements were founded before Vatican II, especially the *Catholic Action* (Azione Cattolica) which started in 1867 and was promoted by pope Pius IX and after World War I by pope Pius XI and under Pius XII in 1959 reached the highest membership of over 3 372 000. With the rise of more well organized Lay Catholic movements or organizations for lay people, like the *Focolare* movement (since 1943), the *Neocatechumenate* (since 1964), Catholic Charismatic Renewal (since 1967), the *Community of Sant'Egidio* (since 1968), the *Jesuit Refugee Service* (since 1982) as an organization conducted by a religious order which also trains laity to care for refugees and migrants, etc., the laity have received alternative places of formation where they find new ways of Christian commitment which were unknown to the traditional parishes from which they originated.

These new movements became extremely attractive to many since they offered something they could not find in their parishes: community life, missionary witness and outreach and social action for the most marginalized in modern society. Non-Government organizations often took up the lead in those fields, for example, *Amnesty International*, founded in 1961 in London, which claims to have over 7 million members and supporters; *Médecins Sans Frontières*, founded in 1971 in France, an international humanitarian medical organization; *Greenpeace* started in 1971, an international environmental organization having around 2.9 million active members and supporters worldwide.²¹

A voice in the wilderness: Carlo Martini's thoughts on the situation of the parish²²

The previous leader of the archdiocese of Milan in Italy, one of the largest in Europe, addressed the challenges the parishes are facing in the Church:

²¹ Cf. Amnesty International, in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amnesty_International; Médecins Sans Frontières, in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9decins_Sans_Fronti%C3%A8res; Greenpeace, in: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenpeace> (11.06.2020).

²² C.M. Martini, *Piccola parrocchia in una grande Europa. La parrocchia: da Giona impaurito nel mare a Davide coraggioso di fronte a Golia*, "Orientamenti Pastoralisti" 40 (1992) p. 11 (ripreso in ID., *Vigilare. Lettere, discorsi e interventi* 1992, Bologna 1993, p. 392).

“Reflecting on the context we are immediately faced with, the question is, how to place the parish within the real context of the era we are experiencing? It is certainly difficult to define the changing context of our age! It’s like orienting yourself in a stormy ocean.”²³ Martini finds a very helpful image in the Old Testament to compare the parish with: “It seems to me that the parish today can be compared to poor Jonah in the stormy sea. Like Jonah, the parish received a mission from God and, like him, is tempted to be afraid of the enormity of its mission. Therefore, it tries to escape from it by refusing to reflect on the current situation, avoiding knowing it in its gravity (we are not touched, we are a good parish; what happens in some parishes in Milan, on the outskirts, but not us!).”²⁴ The pastor Martini puts his finger on the wound when he continues to explain the serious situation of the parish: “The parish, therefore, flees like Jonah in front of Nineveh, does not face the problem in its gravity, does not look at it realistically, in its poverty and inadequacy, with the courage that David had facing Goliath: David looked at Goliath, looked at himself, saw the difference, the currency and then decide.”²⁵ Only by admitting the gravity realistically can the parish be healed: “We must, then, try to understand what is the sea, the stormy ocean in which Jonah fell, and then ask ourselves what word of comfort can we give to Jonah, perhaps taking it from the mouth of David, who also has a word of courage for us. From Jonah frightened in the sea to brave David facing Goliath. Here is the path that I would like you to take.”²⁶

With this beautiful narrative Martini tells us how we should overcome our being blindfolded and how we should have the courage to see and take up the opportunities which are clearly found in the critical situation the parish is locked in. The parish as patient needs first of all a correct diagnosis and then helpful treatment and medication to regain its health again or, in more theological terminology, to recover its own mission to evangelize its members and as an evangelizing community, not only for its own members but also for all its neighbours, especially the most downtrodden and marginalized members of society whom it is able to reach.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

What is the essence of a Christian community?

“The difference between civil and other types of social and cultural communities and Christian communities lies in the fact that the latter are built on their common faith in Jesus as the Lord of new life. Building intercultural Christian and interreligious human communities is not mutually exclusive, rather they complement each other since the aim is to spread the gospel and actualize kingdom values like peace, healing and reconciliation among human beings. In fact humankind and the churches need both basic human and basic Christian communities because both together guarantee a more just and humane society for all people.”²⁷

From a priest-centred institution to a participative community of the People of God

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) with its *communio* ecclesiology was able to open new doors to initiate a transformation process or even paradigm shift from the inherited clergy centred parish model into a more participative and community centred model.²⁸ How can the Christian community and all its members as God’s Holy People live their vocation and mission as an active agent of evangelization (subject of pastoral care) in harmony and collaboration with the ordained ministers of the church?

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church is very clear on the role the Holy Spirit plays in all the Church’s life: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, allotting his gifts according as he wills (cf. 1 Co 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church.” (LG 12.2)

²⁷ P.B. Steffen, *Nurturing Human...*, op. cit, p. 318; cf. B.Bravo Pérez (ed.), *La Iglesia de casa. De la conservación a la misión*, Estella 2010.

²⁸ Cf. F.M. Díez, *Files, sujetos y participantes. Condiciones de posibilidad para una Iglesia más participativa*, in: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca – Instituto Superior de Pastoral, *Por una Iglesia servicial y participativa*, Estella, 1999, p. 127-171.

Post-Conciliar theological reflection on the mission of the parish

Karl Rahner as a systematic theologian has contributed much to the renewal and further development of practical theology since he was convinced that theological reflection has to serve the concrete life of the Church and its members.²⁹ During Vatican II he already declared: “The Church is not a mythical entity... By the will of Christ her founder she is the organized community of the people of God, established through the incarnation in the unity of the one human race. Even if such a society is represented by individual human beings, it still remains a community... in order to exist... a community has to fulfil its nature, must actually function.”³⁰

In another place he stresses what a Christian community has to be: “a community (church) has to serve the poor, has to object to the sinful world. She also has to stand up for justice in the public.”³¹ Nevertheless, Rahner insists that a Christian has to be first of all a community of prayer: “As much as a community cannot be just a service station for pietistic individualistic needs and of the individual’s own happiness and concern for salvation, but has a socio-political and socio-critical responsibility ... so much must a truly Christian church be oriented to God, be a church of adoration of God, in short, a church of prayer.”³²

Rahner’s student, the pastoral theologian, Paul M. Zulehner, developed a practical basic course of believing in community, where he insists on carrying together the responsibility for the community’s mission. For him God is the one who builds his Church and every Christian has to discover God call in his

²⁹ For him, “pastoral theology deals with the action of the Church. It is pastoral because it engages concrete circumstances; it is theological because it reflects systematically on the nature of the Church and analyses the circumstances which confront the Church today. A theology of the Church in action and of action in the Church presupposes, therefore, a knowledge of the Church’s abiding nature, and for this one turns to ecclesiology and dogmatic theology.”, in: K. Rahner, *Theology of Pastoral Action*, London-New York 1968, p. 25.

³⁰ K. Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, London 1973, p. 20; cf. K. Rahner, *Die grundlegenden Imperative für den Selbstvollzug der Kirche in der gegenwärtigen Situation*, in: F. X. Arnold (ed.), *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, II, 1, Freiburg 1966, p. 256-276.

³¹ P.M. Zulehner, *Denn du kommst unserem Tun mit deiner Gnade zuvor... Zur Theologie der Seelsorge heute. Paul M. Zulehner im Gespräch mit Karl Rahner*, Düsseldorf 1984, p. 127.

³² My translation, P.M. Zulehner, op. cit., p. 134.

own life first. In a second step the individual stories of vocation are exchanged in the community. In this way all experience the continuing revelation of God in their midst.³³

The German theologian Peter Eicher explains the essentials of the Christian community. "Every Christian community is continually established anew through the Word, Jesus Christ, who dispenses himself in the words of proclamation and the bread of life: this word establishes communion, the community of the Lord. ... The Lord's giving of himself in his Word with his body demands more than a private response in the individualized devotion of the Sunday congregation: the response it is looking for is a community marked by solidarity and communication."³⁴ According to him there are some dangers we have to see in order to avoid them: "Within the context of the social administration and functional organization that mark the forms of society in industrial countries, the parish itself threatens to become merely the place where salvation is administered." Eicher also feels that a certain bureaucratic mentality in church administration can harm and obscure the very mission of the Church: "In addition, the rational power-structure of the Catholic hierarchy tends towards bureaucratic organization. However efficient this may be when it comes to the liturgy and administration, it equally threatens to absorb into itself the internal consequences and implications of God's communication of himself in Jesus Christ's giving of himself in the Eucharist and in the Word,

³³ Cf. P.M. Zulehner, *Grundkurs gemeindlichen Glaubens. Ein Arbeitshandbuch*, Düsseldorf 1992.

³⁴ P. Eicher, *The Age of Freedom: A Christian Community for Leisure and the World of Work*, "Concilium" (1981) no. 2, p. 50. – "But even the transformation of the nuclear parish into a community marked by communication remains alien to the gospel if it does not intervene in the processes of work and social relationships by means of symbolic actions. ... The reality of the Eucharist cannot lead to an encounter with the Lord if this is not found where he himself let himself be placed by his cross: in the prisons, in the situation of the stranger, the naked, the hungry, the thirsty (Matt. 25:31-46). It is only through its symbolic actions of solidarity that the nuclear parish can make contact with those believers who are to be found on its margins and outside it. What would be desirable would be for every parish to undertake without interruption at least one kind of social work within its own locality and one symbolic campaign beyond it. It is only in this way that it will come to a social awareness of the connections between the message of the kingdom of God and the world of production as it exists in reality with all its forms of repression and its opportunities." In: P. Eicher, p. 50-51.

and thus to squeeze out the missionary consequences and implications of the message of God's gracious action in history."

The theologian puts his finger into the wound when he deplores how Catholics have long ago lost their missionary vocation: "In practice Catholics have long since dispensed themselves from the missionary task laid upon them by baptism and confirmation; and they have done so because the parish structure reduced them to passive recipients of regularly administered doses of salvation, because their proper task of proclaiming the gospel in the family and at work and beyond was no longer confided and entrusted to them. It is only in the new churches and in the many small Protestant churches that lay people find that their missionary vocation is accepted."

Only a parish which regains its original mission to evangelize all people by reaching out to them is faithful to its very vocation as a Christian community. Therefore, Eicher calls for such a missionary outreach by the parish: "But the mission of the parish should once again become something other than the old-style parish mission – which again made the laity merely the recipients of the mission conducted by the clergy. The plain meaning of the gospel is that the good of faith that has been entrusted to us can only stay alive if it is handed on, if it is proclaimed to non-believers and lived out for their benefit."

Eicher criticizes especially that the inherited model of a parish excludes all eschatological tension and that the call for the participation of the laity is only lip-service: "The Sunday community's inner life will determine its everyday life to the extent that its leader together with its members hands the gospel on through missionary activity. This may sound utopian when applied to the established churches of industrialised countries; but that is an indictment against them and the bureaucratic rigidity in which they have become set and which excludes all eschatological tension. What is needed here is not just to pay lip-service to the new theology of the participation of the laity in Christ's threefold office as expressed by Vatican II and John Paul II but to take it seriously with a view to the structural reform that the Catholic Church needs."³⁵ Eicher wrote these critical observations of the reality of the parish already in 1981, thirty-seven years ago. Nevertheless his demands are still valid nowadays and have to be taken seriously if we want to undergo the paradigm change from the parish as a clerical institution to a participative missionary parish community.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

Joachim Wanke gave an important comment on today's situation. For him "the theological continuity – which derives from the beginnings – can only be maintained if we are ready to face the pastoral discontinuities which we can touch with our hands nowadays." And he is convinced that: "Preserving and changing must be in a creative symbiosis. By the way, the Würzburg Synod has failed to turn all 'cared for' parishioners into 'caring' community members. In the future we will always have pastoral care which reaches out to the people and offers them their service. But more than ever, our Church requires witnesses of Christ, not just Church members. It needs networks which act with flexibility to social changes. It needs new hubs for a space-oriented pastoral ministry. It needs projects that open up opportunities for outsiders."³⁶

The pastoral renewal of the Church in France

After World War I (1914-1918) many renewal movements were initiated in the Catholic Church in Europe, such as the liturgical, biblical, catechetical and youth movements. These movements gave new ideas and life to the parishes and Christian communities. The parishes in France discovered and further developed since the 1930s the social and collective dimension of its mission. In 1943 the Mission de Paris was founded with the aim to offer to workers a non- bourgeois Christianity. The book published in 1943 by Henri Godin and Yves Godin *La France, pays de mission?* and Georges Michonneau's book *Paroisse communauté missionnaire: conclusions de cinq ans d'expérience en milieu populaire* criticized the inherited traditional parish model as too middle class oriented and offered a new model of a Christian community able to include all social classes and to convert the parish into an outreaching community.³⁷

In the 1940s Michonneau expressed a radically new conception of the parish: He considered every person within the boundary of his parish as his

³⁶ My translation of Joachim Wanke, Geleitwort, in: B. Ernspurger, M. Fischer, W. Fürst, M. Himmel, *Kursbuch Pastoral. Leidenschaft für das Leben*, Rheinbach 2006, p. 14.

³⁷ G. Michonneau's most important books are: *Paroisse, communauté missionnaire conclusions de cinq ans d'expérience en milieu populaire*, Paris 1946; *L'esprit missionnaire*, Paris 1950; *Le curé*, Paris 1954; *Pour une action paroissiale efficace*, Paris 1954; *Pas de vie chrétienne sans communauté*, Paris 1960; *Propos sur la prédication*, Paris 1963.

“parishioner”; nobody should be excluded. No matter what background a person had, he as the pastor would be responsible to reach out to all of them. “The life of my parish is the life of all these people.” The people of his parish were largely de-Christianized. By transforming the parish into a community capable of announcing Christ to the whole neighborhood, the parish should become a living and missionary community. Concretely, the Christians were gathered in small neighborhood teams, which were encouraged to help each other, even in their material needs. These teams were at the same time places of sharing, of faith, of dialogue, of prayer and of friendship, where they experienced the joy of being together in solidarity, as missionaries and Christians.³⁸

After World War II (1939-1945) the French Church started a process of parish renewal in various dioceses throughout the country. The special French situation of separation of church and state, the high degree of secularization and individualization and the economical poverty of the Church prepared the French Church earlier than the churches in other Western countries to train the laity to become actively involved and co-responsible for the life of the parish community.

In 2014 I could experience this different attitude of French and German parishioners in the German and French Catholic community in Shanghai in China. The French parishioners in Shanghai were performing with a joyful and committed spirit all the ministries they were called and trained to do in their community. They were on good terms with the pastoral ministry of the priest; it was a harmonious cooperation between the lay ministers and the parish priest as their spiritual leader, something I had never experienced in any Catholic parish before.

The Letter by the French bishops published in 1996, *Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle*, shows how advanced the awareness and reflection, based on concrete experience and understanding of the real situation in the Catholic communities is among the bishops. The letter states: “Faced with the temptation to resentment, which leads to seeking and denouncing those responsible for this crisis, we wish to reaffirm what the report on the proposition of faith has already expressed: we accept without hesitation to situate ourselves, as Catholics, in the cultural and institutional context of today, marked in particular

³⁸ Cf. http://filsdelacharite.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/n_georges_michonneau_fr.pdf (31.07.2018).

by the emergence of individualism and the principle of secularism. We refuse any nostalgia for past eras when the principle of authority seemed to prevail indisputably. We do not dream of an impossible return to what was called Christendom.”³⁹

“To you, too, who are interested in ... the future of the Christian faith in our secular society, even if you do not share this faith, we propose this letter, desiring that it helps to facilitate real dialogue and fair discussion. Because our intention is primarily educational and pastoral, we are addressing personal freedoms, not to impose what is already acquired, but to encourage the pursuit of the process of discernment that has already been started. That is why this letter includes three approaches that seem to us inseparable from each other and in which we want to engage with all our local churches, in the diversity of groups and organizations that constitute them.

- First of all, to face the real situation of lived faith: to understand our situation as Catholics in today’s society.
- The next step is to highlight the strengths and points of the experience as they emerge from this effort of understanding: Go to the heart of the mystery of Faith.
- Finally, it is about designing projects so that the Gospel of Christ is effectively lived and proclaimed in and by the Church: To form a Church that proposes the faith.”⁴⁰

In the last three decades the archdiocese of Poitiers initiated a process of pastoral renewal by combining the parishes into Pastoral Sections with one priest being in charge. This new pastoral unit is made up of several local communities. Each community is taken care of by a basic team of five persons who should animate the life of their community. Each one has a particular responsibility in the community: one is responsible for coordinating all pastoral services; another one takes care of the material needs. Three more are responsible for other fields: one for the proclamation of the faith; one for prayer and spiritual life; another for the diaconal service for and with the people. Each team member is called to continue the mission of Christ, but always with the other community members together and never alone. The spiritual companion

³⁹ Les Eveques de France, Lettre aux catholiques de France: «Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle», Paris 1996.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the local community is usually the priest who is responsible for the pastoral section. He will be invited to all meetings of the local teams and supports them in their faith life and missionary engagement as Christians.⁴¹

The renewal approach promoted by the Church in Italy

The Pastoral letter of 2005, *Il volto missionario delle parrocchie in un mondo che cambia*, offers a challenging guideline for developing Christian communities which enables the whole community to be evangelized and to evangelize. The document wishes to promote a missionary parish, a parish community which regains its lost capacity to evangelize and to reach out beyond its borders to the marginalized in society. “The missionary journey of the parish is entrusted to the responsibility of the entire parish community. The parish is not only a presence of the Church in a territory, but ‘a specific community of Christ’s faithful’ (can. 515, § 1), a communion of persons who recognize themselves in the Christian memory lived and transmitted in that place. Individually and together, each one there is responsible for the Gospel and its communication, according to the gift that God has given him and the service that the Church has entrusted to him.”⁴²

The Italian bishops are aware that a change to a missionary pastoral approach is not a simple and easy task, but they are convinced that this is the crucial question, the new frontier of the pastoral ministry of the church in Italy. There is therefore a need for a proper pastoral conversion which touches profoundly all dimensions and aspects of this ministry.⁴³ “The goal of the Italian Bishops is the creation of an authentically missionary parish. To achieve this goal, the document believes that one must not only change pastoral actions

⁴¹ G. Bulteau, *Örtliche Gemeinden begleiten*, in: C. Hennecke et al., *Kirche geht... Die Dynamik lokaler Kirchenentwicklung*, Würzburg 2008, p. 57; cf. J.P. Russell, *Ein Weg des Glaubens in der Sendung der Kirche: die örtlichen Gemeinden*, in: C. Hennecke Ch. et al. (eds.), *Kirche geht...*, p. 45-65; E. Boone, *Aus- und Weiterbildung der örtlichen Gemeinden*, in: C. Hennecke, *Kirche geht...*, op. cit., p. 67-73.

⁴² My translation from “12. Servitori della missione in una comunità responsabile”, *Il volto missionario delle parrocchie in un mondo che cambia, Nota pastorale dell’Episcopato italiano*, 2004.

⁴³ Cf. C. Torcevia, *La Parola edifica la chiesa. Un percorso di Teologia Pastorale*, Trapani 2008, p. 102.

and structures, but above all the way in which those same actions are lived or practiced.”⁴⁴

New inspiration by the Roman Pontiff

The apostolic exhortations, encyclicals and many of the speeches and homilies of Pope Francis aim at promoting a more outreaching and missionary church; a church close to the marginalized and suffering people. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) he dedicated one paragraph to the parish. For him, “The parish is not an out-dated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.” He recognized the parish as one among various institutions or places where evangelization happens, but then he makes a conditional cause when he writes on the evangelizing parish: “If the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptability, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters’.” Here he presumes again a parish as a Christian community and therefore “that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.” Francis makes another important point referring to the local community in its very locality and territory.” The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.”

Pope Francis underlines the outstanding task of the parish to train its members as evangelizers: “In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. And, last not least, Pope Francis applies the nowadays worldwide spread image of the parish as “community of communities” and its role as a centre of missionary outreach: “It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.” He knows that the parishes have not yet sufficiently followed the call by God’s Spirit to be renewed and that they still have to undergo such a process in order to “to make

⁴⁴ My translation of C. Torcevia, op. cit., p. 103.

them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”⁴⁵

Recently he wrote: “This is the joy that the Church is impelled by Jesus to bear witness to and to proclaim in her mission, unceasingly and with ever renewed vigour. The People of God makes its pilgrim way along the paths of history, accompanying in solidarity the men and women of all peoples and cultures, in order to shed the light of the Gospel upon humanity’s journey towards the new civilization of love.”⁴⁶

Pope Francis recognizes the contribution of Vatican II as “a way to overcome the divorce between theology and pastoral care, between faith and life. I dare say that the Council has revolutionized to some extent the status of theology – the believer’s way of doing and thinking”⁴⁷. Appreciating the contribution of the People of God in different continental areas and in dialogue with diverse cultures, he asserts, “The time has now come for it to be consolidated and to impart to ecclesiastical studies that wise and courageous renewal demanded by the missionary transformation of a Church that ‘goes forth’.”⁴⁸

He insists so much on the right spirit: “The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy” (EG 21). A little later he affirms, “The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 28.

⁴⁶ He continues: “Closely linked to the Church’s evangelizing mission, which flows from her very identity as completely committed to promoting the authentic and integral growth of the human family towards its definitive fullness in God, is the vast multidisciplinary system of ecclesiastical studies. This system has developed over the centuries from the wisdom of the People of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in dialogue with, and discernment of, the signs of the times and diverse cultural expressions”, Foreword in: Pope Francis’ Apostolic Constitution “*Veritatis gaudium*” on ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, 29.01.2018, see: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/01/29/180129c.html>

⁴⁷ *Veritatis gaudium*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy." (EG 24)

Pope Francis' concerns are focused on the community: "I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'." (EG 25)⁴⁹

A study on the changes in German parishes and how the dioceses deal with them

Bernhard Spielberg's doctoral dissertation (2007/2008) was published in 2008 under the title *Kann Kirche noch Gemeinde sein? Praxis, Probleme und Perspektiven der Kirche vor Ort*, in English it means: "Can the Church still be a community? Practice, problems and prospects of the local church."⁵⁰

In this study the author aims to give a credible answer to the challenging question of his research by investigating into the "Practice, problems and

⁴⁹ J. O'Halloran, *Walking We Forge a Path. Planning pastorally in the era of Pope Francis*, Dublin 2016.

⁵⁰ B. Spielberg, *Kann Kirche noch Gemeinde sein? Praxis, Probleme und Perspektiven der Kirche vor Ort*, Würzburg 2008. – Spielberg has organized his study in four chapters. The first explains the basic conditions and the context of the Catholic Church in Germany, which constitute the present situation, crisis, challenges and opportunities of the parishes in German dioceses. The statistics give quantitative information on Church membership and the participation of its members in ecclesial life without explaining the reasons for the changed behavior of its members. The Sinus Study is a research project which the German Bishops Conference has commissioned to the Research Institute of the University of Heidelberg in order to show the different expectations, life-style and worldview of the different social classes and milieus have in German society. The results of the Sinus Study published in 2005 caused a lot of discussion among practical theologians and people in leading positions in German dioceses responsible for pastoral planning and organization. The findings of this study indicate for all pastoral workers the opportunities they have with their ministry in parishes if they take into account the different attitudes, life-style and expectations of the various social milieus in the parishes. Any pastoral planning has to discover the opportunities which a differentiated pastoral approach to various social milieus provides.

prospects of the local churches”, what means concretely the way ten German dioceses were handling the dramatic changes in their parishes confronted with many changes in modern society and especially the lack of ordained ministers to lead the parishes.

The Catholic dioceses in Germany are all undergoing a process of radical change on the level of parish communities. The parish as a fixed territory with its members and a place of worshipping and a priestly leadership has a long tradition in the Latin Church with roots in the second half of the first Christian millennium. In Spielberg’s opinion practical theology has the role of noticing developments in the changes in the parishes and the way they are officially organized under the authoritative leadership of the bishops in order to accompany them critically. Its task in this situation is to address the challenges, difficulties, risks and opportunities found in the contemporary transitions in parish life. Spielberg’s practical-theological perspective puts the following questions at the centre of his study:

- What conditions shape the present ecclesial practice?
- What are the current concepts of community development in German dioceses? What are the key lines of development in those concepts?
- What are the perspectives in the current situation?

The underlying research hypothesis states that parishes are the localities where the radical institutional and socio-cultural changing processes are most clearly shown. Therefore they are also the most important places where the renewal of the inherited ecclesial praxis could and should happen.

Spielberg deals in his second chapter with the development of the pastoral, personnel and structural developments in ten German dioceses. The ten dioceses presented do not follow a common policy to respond to the changes in parish life and to the lack of sufficient priests to continue running the numerous inherited parishes as pastoral units (*Seelsorge-Einheiten*). Combining various parishes under the care of pastoral workers under the leadership of a priest, seems to be the most common model the German dioceses are developing. But each diocese has a different strategy to develop those pastoral units or to create the new pastoral reality by combining up to a dozen previous parishes into a new pastoral unit.

To be able to respond positively to the dangers and opportunities of the present transition processes which German dioceses are undergoing in their parishes Spielberg argues for an honest debate among all people involved in the structural and organizational changes. The danger of answering to the present crisis only by creating new structures and by ignoring the changes in

the whole society and in the different milieus has to be avoided. Only then can new creative beginnings occur. For Spielberg too many responsible persons in German dioceses are tempted to believe in the fiction of continuity in pastoral life on the parish level. Parishes will no more be as they have been in the past. Therefore Spielberg argues for an approach of creative confrontation with the new situation. He sees that a creative confrontation of the Gospel with aesthetics nowadays, value orientation and communication patterns still occurs in German dioceses, but that this confrontation is happening nowadays more and more in free initiatives and groups outside the parish. One reason for this, according to the author, is that parishes are seen as the most regulated spaces available in society. Creative confrontation, in other words, needs free space for exchange and constructive dialogue and only a parish which can provide such spaces will attract people to use such places creatively.

In his third chapter Spielberg presents a non-Western approach to pastoral ministry and community building to show that other churches with a different ecclesial and socio-cultural history and with different challenges have been able to respond creatively to the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II. Can a look at the perspective of the *Asian Integral Pastoral Approach* (AsIPA) be of any help to the churches in Europe in their search for integral renewal and even reorganization of their parish communities? Since the context, history and challenges are totally different no simple solutions are possible. No Asian way of being church can just be applied in European churches like a cooking recipe is used for preparing a meal. But any church can learn gradually by comparing different ways of building church community and being an evangelizing church community in a concrete context. For instance the Gospel sharing methods developed in African churches and lived in small Christian communities in Asian churches are a valid way of Christian formation and growth in any ecclesial and socio-cultural context. But the way basic ecclesial communities are functioning in Latin America or small Christian communities and existing in Africa and Asia cannot be just imported into European churches. As African, Asian and American local Catholic churches are searching for ways to create evangelizing Christian communities in their specific socio-cultural and religious-spiritual context, so too European churches have to find ways of creating authentic contextualised and inculturated Christian communities in nowadays European societies. Inculturation and contextualization are not only the need of non-Western churches, but such processes are equally important for the churches in the West. The balance between the spiritual and social, the individual and communitarian dimension

of Christian community life as AsIPA aims at could serve also for Western churches as a creative impulse. The same holds true for the holistic pastoral approach of ecclesial ministry which should overcome the clergy-laity divide and integrate them in the one mission of the church. AsIPA as an approach practiced in Asian churches can inspire European Christians to find in their context and tradition new and credible ways of being church. A European Integral Pastoral Approach has to find a way to inculcate the Gospel into the present times and society. Such an approach would help the churches in Europe to discover anew the spiritual, ethical and community building dimensions which a new reading of the signs of the times can provide for the renewal of the Church in Europe.

In his fourth chapter Spielberg returns to the principal question of the book on the background of the issues discussed in the previous chapters: Can the Church still be community? To answer this, the author examines the societal developments and develops a perspective for the future of the local church. Parish and Christian community are two different notions and ecclesial realities. Parishes should follow their vocation to grow into Christian communities of God's people. Parish life needs the inspiration from the ideal of the Christian community. An always further developed theology of the Christian community as the most basic expression of a participative local church will help the parishes in crisis to develop a new and adequate way of life and communion among its members where each member is welcomed and appreciated with his/her gifts which she/he can contribute to the on-going process to build up the Christian community.⁵¹

The search for new social forms of the Church in Germany

Franz Weber proposes: "First of all, let's take a sober note of the social situation of the Church in German-speaking countries: for many people in this country, the Church is no longer moving. And they draw the consequence that they move; they go away and leave. They do so for reasons which they specifically name, out of disappointment, perhaps hurt, some with a clear decision, because

⁵¹ P.B. Steffen, *Bernhard Spielberg, Kann Kirche noch Gemeinde sein? Praxis, Probleme und Perspektiven der Kirche vor Ort*, Kirche vor Ort, "Urbaniana University Journal", "Urbaniana University Journal" 70 (2017) no. 1, p. 303-307.

in this church, as it lives and is experienced, they do not find the community they seek; others also leave lightly and easily, without deeper motivation and often for financial reasons. Down to the core layers of our parishes, people are disappointed at the Church, because obviously nothing is moving anymore in the Church, because this Church cannot go on any longer, it has stopped. Many have this impression, and probably they are not totally wrong.”⁵²

James D. G. Dunn explains, “If ‘discipleship of Jesus’ still has any meaning for today (and it certainly has) then, the character of that discipleship, particularly of celebration and mission, of openness and service, should be a constant challenge to any ecclesiastical structure which does not positively promote such discipleship. The church exists to enable the same quality of discipleship as that to which Jesus called his first followers.”⁵³

In recent decades *Missio Aachen*, the Pontifical Mission Societies in Germany, has promoted quite a lot the spread of Gospel Sharing methods and the vision of Small Christian Communities in German dioceses.⁵⁴ At the annual conference “Small Christian Communities in the German-speaking area” in December 2004 it founded for the first time a national team of “the Small Christian Communities / Participatory Church Development in Germany”⁵⁵

⁵² My translation of the German original: in F. Weber, *Ja, Kirche geht... Ein persönliches und pastoral-theologisches Bekenntnis zur Dynamik lokaler Kirchenentwicklung*, in: C. Hennecke et al. (eds.), *Kirche geht... Die Dynamik lokaler Kirchenentwicklung*, Würzburg 2008, p. 15.

⁵³ J.D.G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, vol. 2, *Pneumatology*, Edinburgh 1988, p. 247; cf. *Living as Missionary Disciples. A Resource for Evangelization, Committee on Evangelization and Catechetics, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Washington, DC, 2017.

⁵⁴ Cf. D. Tewes, K. Vellguth, *Kirche von der Basis denken. Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften als Modell einer Kirche im Nahbereich*, “Anzeiger für die Seelsorge” 119 (2010) no. 10, p. 33-36; K. Vellguth, *Zwischen Inkulturation eines prophetischen Ansatzes und prophetischer Kontextualisierung*, in: M. Delgado, M. Sievernich (eds.), *Mission und Prophetie in Zeiten der Interkulturalität. FS zum hundertjährigen Bestehen des Internationalen Instituts für missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen 1911-2011*, St. Ottilien 2011, p. 261-271; C. Hennecke – M. Samson-Ohlendorf, *Die Rückkehr der Verantwortung. Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften als Kirche der Nähe*, Würzburg 2011; P.B. Steffen, *A Reflective Book Review: Klaus Vellguth: A New Way of Being Church. The Beginning and the Spread of Small Christian Communities and Bible-Sharing in Africa and Asia*, “Sedos Bulletin” 47 (2015) no. 1-2, p. 18-20.

⁵⁵ “Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften /partizipative Kirchenentwicklung in Deutschland”, see: <http://kcg.missio-blog.de/> – In 2006 a German language webpage was created to spread the work and documents of this movement.

The task of the national team is to coordinate the process of inculturation of the pastoral model of the Small Christian Community / participatory church development in the German-speaking context and its promotion through the organization of training, seminars, networking meetings, information events, learning trips to places outside Germany, like France and Asian and African countries where such models are practiced.⁵⁶ For the national team it is particularly important to jointly develop such an approach in the German-speaking area, in which the participating dioceses want to exchange their learning experiences as a network in order to develop gradually a “participatory church” model which is adapted to their context in a worldwide ecclesial learning community.⁵⁷ Christian Hennecke, the head of the Pastoral Department in the diocese of Hildesheim, had learned a lot about the *Small Christian Communities* in Asian countries and wished to have them as well in his diocese. But the attempt to implement them met a lot of difficulties and more or less failed. What he and others learned was that it needs a local process of church development (*lokale Kirchenentwicklung*), a process where leaders and ordinary members of parishes can develop a vision of a new image of the Church and that it is first a spiritual process of listening to God’s Holy Spirit and his Word which creates us into a church community and makes his Holy People.⁵⁸ In the process of local church community building the focus is always first on baptismal dignity and to deploy the many talents (charisms) God has given to all baptized Christians independently of their place in the Church and human society. Each member is called to life up to their baptismal vocation. Based on the actively lived out baptismal vocation any Christian community is evangelized and able to leave out its evangelizing mission at the

⁵⁶ Cf. C. Hennecke (ed.), *Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften verstehen. Ein Weg Kirche mit den Menschen zu sein*, Würzburg 2009, p. 3. Auflage 2011; C. Hennecke, *Ist es möglich? Vom Wunder des kirchlichen Aufbruchs*, Münster 2013.

⁵⁷ Ibid. – The following dioceses are regularly represented in the National Team: Augsburg, Berlin, Eichstätt, Erfurt, Essen, Hamburg, Hildesheim, Cologne, Limburg, Münster, Paderborn, Osnabrück, Speyer, and Würzburg.

⁵⁸ Cf. C. Hennecke et al. (eds.), *Kirche geht ... Die Dynamik lokaler Kirchenentwicklung*, Echter Verlag, Würzburg 2013; see also: Conferencia Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, *Comunidade de comunidades uma nova parroquia. A conversao pastoral da parroquia*, (Documentos da CNBB 100), Edicoes CNBB, Brasilia, DF, 1ª Edicao 2014.

service of humankind. A Christian community does not exist for itself but for the promotion of God's reign in humanity.

"Local church development processes are characterized by a culture of trust," says Hennecke. "You cannot prescribe trust; you can achieve it in relationships and joint projects."⁵⁹ Beside all the problems and challenges the parish is facing in our times, which have to be taken seriously, there is still reason for hope that the parish can undergo successfully a period of transformation to become an active missionary parish community.

In 2015 the German bishops published the important document "*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*" *Wort der deutschen Bischöfe zur Erneuerung der Pastoral* ("Being Church Together" Word of the German Bishops to Renew Pastoral Ministry). The document stresses that "through baptism, every Christian is called" to live out their baptismal vocation in the Church and that "the many charisms are the richness of the Church."⁶⁰

Being Church Together wants to accompany the way in which the people in the various dioceses are moving from a church of people to a church of the people of God. That is why the text speaks so often of a change of perspective and a change of mentality of the Church as a whole. The common baptismal survey of all the baptized is newly emphasized; and in their service are all those ordained or commissioned by the bishop."⁶¹

The paper recognises that the parishes are undergoing a big transformation process. The new forms of parishes as pastoral units combining several formerly independent parishes in a new unit also have advantages: "they enable different forms of participation. Within a certain territory, the gaze now focuses on the diverse lives of believers and their forms of communion in this territory. The parish understood in this way will increasingly develop into a community of communities and bring forth various locations of ecclesial life."⁶²

⁵⁹ C. Hennecke, *Was meint Lokale Kirchenentwicklung?*, "Euangel. Magazin für missionarische Pastoral", 2013 no. 2, in: <https://www.euangel.de/ausgabe-2-2013/lokale-kirchenentwicklung/was-meint-lokale-kirchenentwicklung/> (30.07.2018); cf. K. Vellguth, *Mission in Europa – ein katholisches Modell*, ZMR 102:1 (2018) p. 95-103.

⁶⁰ Die deutschen Bischöfe, „Gemeinsam Kirche sein“. Wort der deutschen Bischöfe zur Erneuerung der Pastoral, 1. August 2015. (Deutschen Bishopskonferenz, Nr. 100), Bonn 2015.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

The document is convinced that “the merger of small to large parishes must not curtail the diversity of ecclesiastical life; rather, it is the condition that the plurality of places and forms of practice grows and the fundamental accomplishments of liturgy, proclamation and charity are further developed and further differentiated according to the specific situation.”⁶³

The parish communities will have a future if they discover and regain their true vocation as missionary communities. A missionary community “offers the individual members the opportunity to identify themselves with the common mission and to discover their own missionary vocation in each situation and to develop it universally.”⁶⁴ In the face of the crisis of our time, the missionary communities may prove to be a visible “house for all”, like the first Christian communities, in a difficult phase of upheaval through their outspoken commitment, and their living witness as most faithful missionary communities by passing on the faith to the coming generations and proclaiming courageously the Gospel to non-Christians and non-believers.⁶⁵

The parishes as basic units of the Church have always to deal with the two sides of individualization in our Western societies. Therefore the Trier Synod insists on a change of perspective in the way that we need to think from the perspective of the individual member. “The Synod is convinced of the need for a change of perspective and regards it as essential for the future of the local church of Trier. It recognized more deeply, differently and radically that with this change the social, and with it also the Christian, life are changing rapidly.”⁶⁶

“On the one hand, the Synod sees the advantages of individualization in society, for example, the increase in individual freedom, the greater variety of choices, the plurality of lifestyles. At the same time, the Synod addresses the question of how to deal with the negative aspects of individualization, such as the loss of human dignity, isolation and loneliness, competition for

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cf. F.-H. Kochanek, *Theologie einer missionarischen Gemeinde. Studien zu einer praktisch-theologischen Handlungstheorie*, Nettetal 1990, p. 301.

⁶⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. 312; see also: S. Silber, *Kirche, die aus sich herausgeht. Auf dem Weg der pastoralen Umkehr*, Würzburg 2018.

⁶⁶ Abschlussdokument der Synode im Bistum Trier „heraus gerufen Schritte in die Zukunft wagen“, Juni 2016, 14. See: <https://bistum-trier.aufwind-solutions.de/assets/adb/48/48bf71119beddabb.pdf> (06.08.2018)

life opportunities, the elimination of protective communion, and the decline or loss of Christianity Community.”⁶⁷

The Trier Synod wants also to promote Basic Christian communities. “An essential feature of the parish of the future is its design as a network with parish place, other places, basic communities and theme centers (about to Caritas and Diakonia, youth, catechesis or mission). Such a network derives its dynamics from the vibrancy of its nodes (*Knotenpunkte*).”⁶⁸

The final declaration of the Trier Synod comes to the conclusion: “The Church of Trier wants to achieve the desired changes. It is opening a new process of spiritual reassurance and development of a Church with a vision.”⁶⁹

Conclusion

According to Vatican II the Spirit ‘permits the church to keep the freshness of her youth. Constantly he renews her’ (LG 4.1; cf. 9.3). On the basis of his own encounter with very different social forms of church and Christian communities the pastoral theologian Franz Weber has written a credo that expresses his belief in the future viability and hope of the Church:

Yes, the Church is moving! Church is possible under very different cultural, social and biographical conditions, even under the most impractical circumstances, because God makes them possible, because his Spirit gives rise to church as communion, as community in the form of an experiential *communio*, and gives to people spiritual gifts which they use – as in New Testament time – to build communities. Church lives and will remain because she lives from the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. She is not static, unchanging, but a historical reality, which is subject to the law of life of the wheat grain. Here external social forms must pass away again and again, so that new life can

⁶⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

break through which brings fruit for the people. The church has not survived on its way through time because she was unchangeable but as capable of transformation.”⁷⁰

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New Evangelization vis-à-vis Human Rights: Proclaiming the Universality of Human Dignity

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Introduction

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations General Assembly – seventy years ago – in Paris on 10th of December 1948 marked a milestone in the history of humankind. It culminated a long journey of seven centuries from the seminal moment of *Magna Carta Libertatum* issued on 15th of June 1215 by King John of England. Paradoxically, this was the period – the end of 12th century and the beginning of 13th century – in which inquisition was out to torture and even put to death for religio-political motives. Instead, the publication of *La France, pays de mission?* (1943) by Henri Godin and Yves Daniel denoted the inverse situation of Christian Europe being secularized, but upholding human rights and condemning torture and death penalty. In other words, during the past seven decades while human rights culture has been gaining ever-wider acceptance in the secular world, Christian faith has been gradually losing ground in Europe under the impact of modern/post-modern secular currents. Our hunch is that upholding the universality of human dignity central to the human rights culture may be the privileged locus of new evangelization.

We shall attempt to corroborate this in four steps. In the first place, we clarify how incarnation – the core of the good news – underlines the universality of human dignity and the value of every aspect of human life, which are also cherished by the human rights culture. Secondly, we spell out how the growing body of social doctrine of the Church has sought to uphold the

dignity of the human person as essential to Christian faith. Thirdly, we offer a brief overview of the current human rights tradition. Based on these, lastly, we elucidate how new evangelization can be viewed as proclamation of the universality of human dignity in the ethical discourses related to human rights.

1. Human dignity in the light of Incarnation

Unquestionably, “incarnation” is the core of Christian faith. It stands for the entire event of the Son/Word of God becoming the historical person of Jesus Christ. Although Christological currents differ in accentuating the divine or the human nature, in the face of errors and heresies, the Church tradition has asserted the belief in Jesus Christ as true God and true man, with his pre-existence as the Word/Wisdom of God and his post-paschal existence as the risen one, actively building up the Reign of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹

1.1. Significance of the biophysical facets of Incarnation

The essential features of incarnation can be summed up in the kerygma, namely, birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the understanding of the Christian community, the whole of the biblical tradition is focused on this kerygma, with the Old/First Testament serving as an immediate preparation and the New/Second Testament as the narrative account of incarnation.

The fact that incarnation at the moment of conception required the free consent of a young woman points to the divine acknowledgment of human liberty and its dignity. It is significant that human consent was indispensable for the incarnation of the Son of God as a human person. It underscores the dignity of human freedom or liberty upheld in varied ways by the human rights tradition. Even the “original sin” as described in the book of Genesis (3:1-6) suggests that human beings were free right from the beginning!

Jesus’ death on the cross, in a tragic and dramatic way, reveals that the incarnate one in the depth of his liberty chose to remain nailed to the human condition, even unto death. In other words, the incarnate one chose to embrace human nature as an ever-enduring love for humanity, rather than free

¹ M. Bordoni, *Cristologia*, in: G. Barbaglio, S. Dianich (eds.), *Nuovo dizionario di teologia*, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 1991⁶, p. 234-271.

himself of the cross with his divine power. The resurrection of Jesus and his ascension confirm further that the human nature that we share with him is eternally bound to his divine nature, to the reality of God. This eternal bond or covenant between the human and the divine nature is what makes Christian faith the good news of salvation. As Christians then we cannot think of God without a human countenance, and think of the human being without a divine constituent. In this way, incarnation makes possible the full realization of human dignity in being divinized, that is, in being fully open to the divine. What's more, according to some Fathers of the Church while creating the human being, God already had in mind the incarnation of the Son. Thus, creation and incarnation reveal the universality of the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27; 5:1-2).

1.2. Significance of the contextual attributes of Incarnation

Incarnation of the Son of God, in a way exalts humanity in all its features. The fact that the Word became flesh manifests the significance of the biological aspect of human life, and the importance of all that goes to sustain bodily life: food, clothes, home, family, etc. Jesus' birth in a manger, his being part of a family, his preaching in the temple, synagogues and at lake sides, his being a guest of sinners and religious elites, his contact with the local authorities and roman rulers, etc., reveal the significance of his life as a Galilean Jew moulded by temporal and spatial features: biological, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, societal, political, economic, geographic and gastronomic aspects. Jesus' life and teaching, namely, the content of the gospel message, has to be situated at the intersection of all these factors. It is the historical-contextual nature of incarnation that makes Jesus and his message relevant to every dimension of human life.

The contextual attributes of incarnation reveal the Christian community to be the salt (Mt 5:13) that elates the varied flavours of the food items. Without the salt, the food would become insipid. Similarly, it is the hidden yeast, the Reign of God (Mt 13:33), that can enliven the dough and induce the full flourishing of human life. Envisioning the overall scope of proclaiming the gospel message in this manner – as emphasized by *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council² – has become particularly significant and urgent as

² For full text of the Documents of the Catholic Church referred to in this chapter, see: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm>

the European society moves from the modern to post-modern culture becoming ever more secularized, with some sensitivity for the spiritual, but not so much for the religious. The passionate effort to ground human rights on the dignity of human person – independently of the Christian and religious traditions – is emblematic of the current situation. It has obliged the Christian communities to embrace with renewed thrust every aspect of human life – including the environmental or ecological concerns – as significant to Christian faith. This is borne out by the Church’s ethical tradition that we shall briefly examine in the next section.

2. Human dignity at the core of the Catholic social doctrine

The bioethical and socio-ethical doctrine of the Church focus on the entire gamut of human life comprising the socioeconomic and political conditions for its full flourishing. Such a doctrinal tradition advocating the dignity of the human person, points to the relevance of the good news in nurturing and upholding human rights culture.

2.1. Bioethical features of human dignity

According to the Christian tradition, human beings created in God’s image (Gen 1:27; 5:1-2), reflecting God’s own spirit, have an intrinsic value.³ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in *Donum Vitae* (1987, n. 5) succinctly clarifies: “Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being”. The same Congregation earlier in *Quaestio de abortu procurato* (1974, n. 11) had underscored: “The first right of the human person is his life. He has other goods and some are more precious, but this one is fundamental – the condition of all the others. Hence it must be protected above all others”. In this vein, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2003, n. 2281) adds: “It is God who remains the sovereign Master

³ J.J. McCartney, *Social implications of abortion*, in: J.A. Dwyer (ed.), *The new dictionary of Catholic social thought*, Collegeville MN 1994, p. 8.

of life. [...] We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of". In *Christifideles Laici* (1988, n. 37), John Paul II elucidates the theological basis for the defence of human life and its dignity in following terms:

The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a 'child in the Son' and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God. [...] The most radical and elevating affirmation of the value of every human being was made by the Son of God in his becoming man in the womb of a woman, as we continue to be reminded each Christmas.

In this vein, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) sums up the official stand of the Catholic Church on inviolability of human life. In dealing with questions concerning the right to life, the pope warns about the paradox that acts which were once considered as crimes now seem to assume the nature of "rights" (n. 11). He solemnly condemns intentional killing of the innocent persons in general (n. 57), procured abortion (n. 62) and euthanasia (n. 65). These are crimes which no human law can legitimize (n. 70-73) and represent the absolute limits below which free individuals cannot lower themselves (n. 75). He also backs the move towards the abolition of death penalty (n. 56), and allude to the clash between life-affirming and life-denying cultures, between "culture of life"⁴ and "culture of death".⁵ Taking the debate to its logical conclusion, in his recent address on the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pope Francis affirms:

⁴ W.C. Brennan, *Culture of life*, in: M.L. Coulter et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Catholic social thought, social science, and social policy*, Lanham/Toronto/Plymouth 2007, p. 269.

⁵ W.C. Brennan, *Culture of death*, in: M.L. Coulter et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Catholic social thought, social science, and social policy*, Lanham/Toronto/Plymouth 2007, p. 268-269. When dealing with "culture of death", while abortion and euthanasia are mentioned by the pope, death penalty is bracketed out.

It must be clearly stated that the death penalty is an inhumane measure that, regardless of how it is carried out, abases human dignity. It is per se contrary to the Gospel, because it entails the wilful suppression of a human life that never ceases to be sacred in the eyes of its Creator [...]. It is necessary, therefore, to reaffirm that no matter how serious the crime that has been committed, the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and the dignity of the person.⁶

It is the inviolability and the dignity of the human life that is at the heart of the Christian and the human rights traditions. Denying it would make the gospel message an empty platter and the human rights an illusory achievement (*Christifideles Laici* n. 38).

2.2. Socio-ethical features of human dignity

Over a period of a century and a quarter, the papal encyclicals and exhortations from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) of Pope Leo XIII to *Laudato Si* (2015) of Pope Francis, have progressively built up a consistent body of social doctrine, addressing the emerging socioeconomic and political questions in an ever-wider perspective of justice and peace. Obviously, with these official pronouncements the Catholic Church does not aim at determining the public policy of any nation, but offering the state, society and individuals the moral basis for meeting the socioeconomic responsibilities and challenges. The modern Social Doctrine of the Church to a great extent draws attention to what has come to be known as the second generation of human rights, namely, the socioeconomic rights.⁷ Here we present a brief overview of its chronological development.

Written at the beginning of the industrial revolution in Europe, the first major social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) of Leo XIII was motivated by the poverty of workers on the one hand, and by the growth of socialist and

⁶ Address of Pope Francis to participants in the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for promoting the New Evangelization, 11 October 2017, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/october.index.html> (27.10.2017).

⁷ J. Fredericks, *Survey of Catholic Social Teachings*, "Journal of Dialogue & Culture", 4 (2015) no. 2, p. 109-110, 114.

communist movements, on the other. As underlined in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (n. 268), “*Rerum Novarum* is above all a heartfelt defence of the inalienable dignity of workers, connected with the importance of the right to property, the principle of cooperation among the social classes, the rights of the weak and the poor, the obligations of workers and employers and the right to form associations”. Written on the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), amidst growing fascism in Europe and major economic depression, emphasized the social dimension of property ownership, the merits of corporatism, and the concepts of social justice and subsidiarity; it also denounced the dangers of increasing child and female labour. Viewed against the backdrop of *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), there is no doubt that many of the ideas found in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) have some association with these encyclicals.⁸

Written on the 70th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John XXIII’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961) advocates worker participation and ownership and marks the widening of focus to international poverty and inequalities as the developing countries began to gain independence from the colonial powers. Although the rights language, as such, first appeared in John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the groundwork was already laid in *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937), in which Pius XI denounced Nazi racism as opposed to Christian teachings, and affirmed that insofar as man is created in God’s image, human rights derive from God. Increasing use of rights language has made Church’s social teachings more accessible to the modern world.⁹ Addressing all people of goodwill – a first time in papal documents – amidst the nuclear war threat foreshadowed by Cuban missile crisis and the civil rights movement in the US, John XXIII’s plea for peace in *Pacem in Terris* (1963) evinced the need for a social order based on rights and duties of individuals, public authorities and the world community. Condemning arms race and racism, the pope advocated that resources be shared for promoting true development of peoples.

⁸ M.P. Orsi, *Catholic Social Thought*, in: M. L. Coulter et al. (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science, and Social Policy*. Lanham/Toronto/Plymouth 2007, p. 152-154; J. Fredericks, op. cit., p. 110-111.

⁹ M.P. Orsi, op. cit., p. 152-154.

The pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), underscored that the Church should be sensitive to human affairs by sharing the joys and hopes, and the griefs and anxieties of peoples. The Church was to discern the “signs of the times” (n. 4) in the light of the Gospel and enhance human dignity and common good, upholding justice and peace. The Council’s declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), in its turn invited Christians to respect religious freedom and called on the states to respect the freedom of the religious communities to operate freely, and the freedom of individuals in responding to God.

Paul VI’s encyclical on the development of peoples *Populorum Progressio* (1967), deals with structural poverty, international justice, limits of profit motive, and right to private property. In this vein, in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), the apostolic letter written on the 80th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Paul VI draws attention to the condition of labour and calls on Christians to build a just world overcoming structural injustice with an option for the poor – taking up the concern of the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America in Medellin (1968). The Statement of the Synod of Bishops *Justitia in Mundo* (1971) is the first major example of a post-Vatican II document in which the episcopal collegiality affirms the right to a culturally sensitive personalized development, overcoming structural sin. It becomes clear that the Church must witness to justice through its own lifestyle, educational activities, and international action. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Paul VI draws attention to the profound bond between the gospel message and the cultures of peoples, making possible a reciprocal critical enrichment of the Church and society.

In *Laborem Exercens* (1981), written on the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II draws attention to work as essential to human dignity and social life. Upholding the rights of workers and denouncing their exploitation, the pope criticises both capitalism and Marxism. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), the pope commemorates and updates *Populorum Progressio* (1967) from a global perspective reaffirming the critique of capitalism and Marxism by denouncing the structures of sin and arms race, and the need for solidarity and the preferential option for the poor. Condemning every form of discrimination that undermines human dignity of the victim as well as of the perpetrator, the pope clarifies:

The dignity of the person constitutes the foundation of the equality of all people among themselves. As a result all forms

of discrimination are totally unacceptable, especially those forms which unfortunately continue to divide and degrade the human family, from those based on race or economics to those social and cultural, from political to geographic, etc. Each discrimination constitutes an absolutely intolerable injustice, not so much for the tensions and the conflicts that can be generated in the social sphere, as much as for the dishonour inflicted on the dignity of the person: not only to the dignity of the individual who is the victim of the injustice, but still more to the one who commits the injustice (*Christifideles Laici* n. 37).

In his encyclical *Centesimus annus* (1991), marking the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II makes a review of the hundred years of social teaching drawing attention to human dignity and human rights, justice and peace. Denouncing the idolatry of the market and the insanity of arms race, the pope also clarifies – for the first time – that the world’s goods (including intellectual property) have a “universal destination”. It may be mentioned that among other documents of John Paul II the ones that focus on mission, namely, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) and *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), are relevant to our discussion here.

In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Benedict XVI, updating *Populorum Progressio* on its 40th anniversary, offers a theological framework for the social doctrine and a comprehensive review of its development, underscoring environmental concerns and intergenerational justice. In the post-synodal exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis focuses on the joy of sharing the gospel message, taking into account the social dimension of evangelization, while denouncing the economy of exclusion and consumerism. Likewise, in *Laudato Si* (2015) he addresses the environmental crisis and regrets that progress in science and technology has not been matched by moral, ethical and spiritual growth.

These bioethical and socio-ethical features of human dignity have their relevance for the proclamation of the good news; they also correlate extensively with the human rights tradition that we shall briefly present in the next section.

3. Human dignity as the basis of human rights¹⁰

The affirmation of Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” – may be considered the basis of all other rights. The preamble of the Declaration endorses the dignity, worth and equality of human persons and calls for the effort “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been further elaborated in two major treaties: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). This emerging tradition encompasses three generations of human rights revolving around the three values advocated by the French revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity.

The so-called first generation human rights, referred to as “blue rights”, comprise civil liberties besides political and judicial rights. Rooted in liberalism, these rights represent the spirit of the West. The liberties are said to be natural rights, because people possesses them “by nature”, whereas political rights are an extension of the existing rights of the aristocracy to all citizens. The judicial rights underline the right to justice in defending and asserting one’s rights with due process of law.

The second generation, referred to as “red rights”, include economic, social and cultural rights. They take inspiration from socialism, and their roots can be traced to the former socialist Eastern bloc. The UN International Covenant spells out these rights in terms of labour rights, social security, family life, standard of living, physical and mental health, education, and participation in cultural life. To these the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) adds the right to asylum, equality of men and women, rights of the child, the elderly and the disabled.

An apparently disturbing question regarding human rights is whether they are restricted to citizens. If so, would it not compromise the universality of these rights? This explains the catalogue of rights being extended in the Refugee Convention (1951). It establishes the rights of outsiders to a specific

¹⁰ This section is based on: J.A. Van der Ven, J.S. Dreyer, H.J.C. Pieterse, *Is there a God of Human Rights? The Complex Relationship between Human Rights and Religion: A South African Case*, Leiden / Boston 2004, p. 77-116.

civil society. Besides clarifying the juridical status, the Refugee Convention addresses the questions such as employment, decent standard of living, and freedom of movement of the refugees and displaced persons.

The third generation of collective rights, namely, the “green rights” deal with the emerging needs of the developing countries. They find expression in documents of international law, such as the Stockholm Declaration of the UN Conference on the Human Environment (1972), and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992). The third generation includes rights such as healthy environment, natural resources, cultural heritage, intergenerational equity and sustainability.

These generations of rights are interrelated insofar as one set of rights calls for the other. According to the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action at the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), these rights are indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. In other words, the implementation of civil, political and judicial rights (first generation) requires the implementation of social rights (second generation), and vice versa. There is a growing debate, whether the third generation of rights are not equally based on the concept of human dignity, as are the other two. The three generations of rights respectively represent legal rights, legal obligations and moral obligations. The civil and political rights represent the legal rights of the individual, the socioeconomic rights represent the legal obligations on the part of the state, whereas the collective rights represent the moral obligation of the state, individuals and communities; all of which warrant the dignity of the human person. According to most philosophers, sociologists of law and jurists, human rights can be legitimized on secular grounds, and that there is no need to seek religious or theological reasons. For, they require no foundation other than the dignity, freedom and equality of human beings.¹¹

4. New evangelization with reference to human rights

It is useful to recall that the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops focused on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (7 to 28 October 2012). The references made to the expressions “new

¹¹ J.A. Van der Ven et al., op. cit., p. 255-256.

evangelization”, “human dignity” and “human rights” in the synodal process suggest the interconnection between the three concepts. Interestingly, *Lineamenta* (2011) used the expression “new evangelization” in the text 96 times and the *Instrumentum Laboris* (2012) used it 114 times in the text, dedicating an entire chapter to it (n. 41-89), whereas the post-synodal exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) employs the term rather sparingly, just 12 times. As for the concept of “human dignity”, the *Lineamenta* makes use of it three times and the *Instrumentum Laboris* five times, whereas *Evangelii Gaudium* refers to it 23 times. Concerning “human rights”, we find that the *Lineamenta* makes reference to it twice and the *Instrumentum Laboris* also twice, whereas *Evangelii Gaudium* uses the term 16 times. Overcoming the inflation in the use of “new evangelization” – when compared to the *Lineamenta* and the *Intrumentum Laboris* – the exhortation lays greater emphasis on the correlated concepts of “human dignity” and “human rights”.

The expression “new evangelization” introduced by John Paul II has acquired varied meanings according to specific ecclesial and social contexts. In the current context of growing secularism and scientific progress, as Midali clarifies,¹² it stands for the process of evangelization emphasising the primacy of the human person and the promotion of her/his dignity. The power of science and technology, today, reaches all moments of human life, soliciting a redefinition of the place of human beings in the universe. Amidst relativism and disorientation, some consider Church’s stand as opposed to human rights (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 64). Addressing this evolving scenario, John Paul II affirmed that since “the mystery of man is inscribed with a special force of truth and love in the mystery of Christ” (*Redemptor Hominis* n. 18), the radical questions about the future of humanity directly concerns the ecclesial community and its apostolate (*Christifideles Laici* n. 36-38). In this perspective, new evangelization is the rediscovery and reaffirmation of the inviolability of human dignity implying human rights:

To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service, which

¹² M. Midali, *Teologia pratica. 2. Attuali modelli e percorsi contestuali di evangelizzazione*, Roma ⁴2008, p. 143-155.

the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family. [...] The dignity of the person is the most precious possession of an individual. [...] In virtue of a personal dignity, the human being is always a value as an individual, and as such demands being considered and treated as a person and never, on the contrary, considered and treated as an object to be used, or as a means, or as a thing. [...] The dignity of the person is the indestructible property of every human being. The force of this affirmation is based on the uniqueness and irrepeatability of every person [...] (*Christifideles Laici* n. 37).

In effect the acknowledgment of the personal dignity of every human being demands the respect, the defence and the promotion of the rights of the human person. It is a question of inherent, universal and inviolable rights. No one, no individual, no group, no authority, no State, can change – let alone eliminate – them because such rights find their source in God himself (*Christifideles Laici* n. 38).

Accordingly, with reference to human rights, new evangelization can be viewed at three different levels of ethical discourse on human dignity: meta-ethical discourse, normative ethical discourse and legal ethical discourse. While meta-ethical discourse deals with religious or transcendent foundations of human dignity, normative ethical discourse seeks to clarify the criteria for evaluating human action, and legal ethical discourse focuses on social and legal practices.¹³ Building on the foregoing three sections that alluded to these levels of ethical discourse, in the present section we attempt to delineate the process of new evangelization as meta-ethical, normative ethical and legal ethical discourse on human dignity.

¹³ S.F. Magni, *Bioetica*, Roma 2011, p. 43-46.

4.1. Evangelization as meta-ethical discourse on human dignity¹⁴

The meta-ethical discourse deals with religious or transcendent foundations of human dignity; and as such, it stands for the religious legitimation of human rights. Religious legitimation or meta-ethical discourse may be viewed from internal (*ad intra*) and external (*ad extra*) perspectives. From an internal perspective, the religious legitimation can evolve “in terms of” and “with the view to”. In the first case, the religious traditions – like the Christian tradition presented in section one – can shed light on the meaning and foundation of human rights with the help of metaphors, symbols, and theories specific to each. In the second case, religious traditions can nourish and legitimize human rights culture with the view to promoting the latter among the believers. In this vein, the external dimension of religious legitimation would refer to its contribution to the public arena, engaging disciplines such as philosophy, sociology of law and jurisprudence. It could also encompass dialogue with other non-religious and religious interpretations of human rights. Thus, religious legitimation can contribute to opinion formation in the civil society, as well as nurture human rights culture within the religious community. It follows that Christian legitimation of human rights, on the basis of Christian metaphors, symbols and theological reflection, can serve as public theology in the secularized European society. On the one hand, Christian legitimation of human rights can be a way of sharing the Christian message while promoting the common good in society; on the other, nurturing human rights culture through religious legitimation can deepen the faith of those within the ecclesial fold.

As highlighted by Van der Ven et al., two concepts play a crucial role in the meta-ethical discourse on human rights: “human dignity” and “image of God”. Typically a secular concept, “human dignity” in the last analysis can open itself up to the transcendent, the mystery of God; whereas “image of God”, typically a religious concept, can be grasped with its secular roots. From a secular perspective, human rights are said to be self-evident and do not necessitate any foundation other than human dignity. Nevertheless, the “image of God” metaphor that has its significance for the Christian tradition can nurture human rights, enabling as well an overlapping consensus with other world-views in the public domain.

¹⁴ In this subsection, we sum up the elaborate discussion by: J.A. Van der Ven et al., *op. cit.*, p. 261-303.

Although the biblical “image of God” (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:5-6) has its roots in the non-biblical world, it is from the perspective of creation theology that one can infer the universal significance of the “image of God” as referring to all people. There are also biblical texts that present restricted views of the image of God: referring primarily to men, and only secondarily to women (1 Cor 11:7); conforming the predestined believers, leaving aside the non-believers (Rom 8:29); focused on Christ as the first-born of all creation (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4). Even if the restricted views of the image of God, have their relevance within the Christian tradition, meta-ethical discourse cannot ignore the universal extent of its significance as referring to all human beings.

According to the Fathers of the Church, human beings could never cease to be images of God, insofar as it is an integral part of their being creatures. “But likeness, it was said, referred to the original relationship to God that was forfeited because of sin, restored by Christ, and could be perfected in ever closer likeness to God-in-Christ, growing to ever greater perfection. Thus, ‘image’ was put in a creation theology framework and ‘likeness’ in a Christological, soteriological and eventually even an eschatological framework”.¹⁵ From a more spiritual and mystical perspective the “image” represents human being’s initial situation in relation to God, whereas “likeness” stands for the end situation resulting from the spiritual transformational process.

Nonetheless, the universality of “image of God” cannot be limited to Christians as reflecting the primal image in Christ, nor to those who strive for spiritual or contemplative union with the likeness of God in Christ or mirror the Trinitarian God in the communion with the poor and the emarginated. Instead, the creation-centred universalism needs to be further extended in terms of a decentred, complex universalism, which makes possible the recognition of the plurality of universalisms peculiar to other religions. In this vein, “if theology opens itself to the basic ideas on human rights thought and practice in philosophy, sociology and law and contributes its own ideas and concepts to the discourse with these secular sciences, it can make a meaningful input in opinion formation in civil society [...]”.¹⁶ With the strides made in biotechnology and robot-technology that endanger the very biological constitution of the human species, moving towards what may be termed as the “post-human”,

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 264.

new evangelization has the task of calling culture back to the principles of authentic humanism and “ecology of the human person” (*Christifideles Laici* n. 38; *Lineamenta* n. 21; *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 213).

4.2. Evangelization as normative ethical discourse on human dignity

The moral aspect of “image of God” metaphor points to the practice of connective justice with a preferential option for the poor. The fact that human beings are bearers of human dignity entails this moral injunction, namely, being a human being to the one in need.¹⁷ “Here we have not only the philosophical dialectics between ontology and morality, but also the theological dialectics between theological anthropology and theological ethics or, in religious terms, the dialectics between being created in the image of God and acting on the basis of and towards becoming the image of God”.¹⁸ As God’s images, human beings are to express their solidarity making a preferential option for the poor, the weak, and the sick (*Christifideles Laici* n. 38). On the other hand, as *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 198) underscores, the poor have an active role in the evangelization process:

Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom, which God wishes to share with us through them.

Globalizing solidarity without marginalizing anyone is the Christian response to the challenge of dehumanizing globalization. Solidarity is not a sentiment of vague compassion or superficial emotion for the suffering of the people; it is rather the firm determination to work for the common good, or rather for the good of everybody and everyone, because all are really responsible

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 291-294.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 302.

for all (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* n. 38). It is in this coexistence, in this “making ourselves as neighbours to others” in solidarity that we find the capacity and the modality of revealing the full meaning of living, believing, hoping and loving. In this sense, human rights do not merely refer to judicial aspects, they imply ethical and moral imperatives, concerning which Christian communities can play a vital role (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 190).

While *Lineamenta* (n. 6) refers to the civic and political sector as one of the sectors calling for new evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium* highlights what has been achieved “in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defence of life, human and civil rights, and so forth” (n. 65). In this vein, the exhortation underscores the proclamation of “the Gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15) as privileged area of new evangelization (n. 218, 239), just as defending the dignity and rights of women in society and in the Church (n. 104, 212). The socio-ethical discourse broached in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church that we reviewed in section two of the present chapter, can further exemplify the normative ethical discourse on human dignity.

4.3. Evangelization as legal ethical discourse on human dignity

Evangelization with reference to legal ethical discourse can be viewed in connection with the long history of canon law, starting from the set of rules established by the Council of Jerusalem and reaching a climax in the Catholic Church with the promulgation of *Codex Juris Canonici* by Pius X (1917) and its reformed version promulgated by John Paul II as the second *Codex Juris Canonici* (1983) for the Catholics of the Latin rite and *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990) for the Eastern Catholic Churches. In its development, the Church’s legal discourse has taken inspiration from the Hebrew, Roman, Visigothic, Saxon, and Celtic legal traditions, and at the same time has contributed to the legal tradition in Europe and elsewhere.

As a legal system inspired by Christian faith to regulate ecclesial life, but open to public scrutiny in the societal context, it has to uphold human dignity and cope with the human rights tradition. This is particularly urgent with reference to safeguarding Christian religious identity and proposing it to others, given the current situation of growing religious and lay fundamentalism. Honouring human dignity in the context of evangelization would require respecting the religious freedom of others, as endorsed by the Second Vatican Council’s *Dignitatis Humanae* (n. 2):

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. [...] the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person [...].

In this vein, the Synod Fathers reaffirmed religious freedom as a fundamental human right (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 255). Therefore, proclaiming the gospel truth cannot be done without due respect for the ethics of communication linked to the dignity of the human person:

Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it (*Dignitatis Humanae* n. 3).

Consequently, new evangelization has to take into account the indications of the Second Vatican Council and of the post-conciliar documents concerning ecumenical dialogue, interreligious dialogue, and wider dialogue that does not exclude anyone (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 92, 21; *Ecclesiam suam* n. 96-117). It means that the Christian community has to abandon competitive attitudes and behaviours, instead contribute to mutual attitudes and behaviours of attention, reconciliation, and sincere, wise and courageous dialogue.

It is noteworthy that the recent ecumenical document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (2011)¹⁹ has focused

¹⁹ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20111110_testimonianza-cristiana_en.html (20.10.2018).

its attention on the ethics of communication. For, it is the communicative action of the messenger that attests to the authenticity of the message. As the document points out, an authentic communication cannot resort to deception and coercive means. Likewise, exploitation of poverty through allurements of financial incentives and rewards can compromise the authenticity of Christian witness. In proclaiming the gospel, we cannot therefore engage in any form of psychological or social pressure, abuse of power, unjust discrimination, repression, or violent destruction of sacred places, symbols and texts of other religious traditions. This is also true when addressing those who do not adhere to any religious tradition:

As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation. A special place of encounter is offered by new Areopagi such as the Court of the Gentiles, where “believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence” [*Propositio* 55]. This too is a path to peace in our troubled world (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 257).

Conclusion

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we may affirm that new evangelization in the current secularizing context requires a competent dialogue with the human rights tradition in proclaiming the universality of human dignity. Upholding human dignity through meta-ethical Christian vision of the human person being the “image of God” can be a service to humanity and a way of sharing the gospel. The normative ethical discourse based particularly on the social doctrine of the Church is a significant way of engaging in dialogue with those within the Christian fold and in society. Dealing with Church’s legal system with reference to human rights would require that upholding and sharing Christian identity should respect the ethics of communicative action.

In the process of evangelization, the dialogue between Christian faith and human rights can be mutually refining and enriching. In other words, the Christian tradition also stands to gain. For example, condemning death penalty as contrary to the Gospel and inadmissible insofar as it is an attack on the inviolability and the dignity of the person, Pope Francis acknowledges this development as a case of consolidation and refinement of Church's tradition:

Tradition is a living reality and only a partial vision regards the 'deposit of faith' as something static. The word of God cannot be moth balled like some old blanket in an attempt to keep insects at bay! No. The word of God is a dynamic and living reality that develops and grows because it is aimed at a fulfilment that none can halt. This law of progress, in the happy formulation of Saint Vincent of Lérins, 'consolidated by years, enlarged by time, refined by age' (*Commonitorium*, 23.9: *PL* 50), is a distinguishing mark of revealed truth as it is handed down by the Church, and in no way represents a change in doctrine. Doctrine cannot be preserved without allowing it to develop, nor can it be tied to an interpretation that is rigid and immutable without demeaning the working of the Holy Spirit."²⁰

On the other side, empirical research among the young in the European context and elsewhere brings to light that some aspects of religious attitude and religious socialization do have significant impact on human rights attitude.²¹

²⁰ Address of Pope Francis to participants in the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for promoting the New Evangelization, 11 October 2017, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/october/index.html> (27.10.2017).

²¹ See the publications of the international empirical research projects concerning "Religion and Human Rights": J.A. Van der Ven, F.-V. Anthony, *Impact of religion on social integration from an empirical civil rights perspective*, in: "Salesianum" 70 (2008) p. 317-338, 463-489; J.A. Van der Ven, H.-G. Ziebertz (eds.), *Human rights and the impact of religion*, Leiden/Boston 2013; F.-V. Anthony, H.-G. Ziebertz (eds.), *Religious Identity and National Heritage: Empirical-Theological Perspectives*, Leiden/Boston 2012; F.-V. Anthony, C. Sterkens, *The Impact of Religion on Civil Human Rights: An Empirical-Theological Study*, in: C. E. Wolfteich, A. Dillen (eds.), *Catholic Approaches in Practical Theology. International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 286), Leuven 2016, p. 225-252;

The fact that both Christian tradition and the human rights culture uphold the universality of human dignity makes the latter a basis for new evangelization as a correlational process of mutual refinement and enrichment.

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Religious Freedom as a Prerequisite for a Multi-religious and Multi-cultural Europe. A Fragile Right Thrives on a Lively Social Discourse

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Let me begin my reflections on religious freedom in Europe by providing a frame of reference for them. Religious freedom does not mean a state or a society that is irreligious or without faith. The question is how the state can facilitate and protect the exercise of religious freedom in society. That said, we are not talking here about unlimited freedom for those who justify their actions by reference to religious motives and thus claim the right to religious freedom for themselves and their deeds. The issue is rather one of an adequate guarantee of religious freedom in society. Here, at the very latest, it transpires that religious freedom is not an absolute value or an absolute right but rather a right that has to be weighed against other values and rights. It is a right that has to be fought for. Therefore, the state constantly has to find the right balance in properly facilitating the free exercise of religion in a society undergoing change and development, not least as the result of migration, and thus providing an adequate guarantee and protection of the right to religious freedom.

Whenever there is talk of a threat to religious freedom it is generally seen in a global context with regard to events beyond the borders of Europe. In 2015, the renowned Pew Research Center in the United States published a comprehensive study looking at global restrictions on religious

freedom.¹ Its research team established that in over a third of all the countries investigated (39 percent of 198 countries) the right to religious freedom was “severely” or “very severely” curtailed by government or non-government players. In other words, the majority of the world’s population (77 percent) suffers from a marked or very marked restriction of religious freedom. And the trend continues upwards. Whereas 68 percent of the world’s population experienced severe restrictions of their religious freedom in 2007 and 76 percent in 2012, a new high was reached in the latest study published.²

Restrictions on religious freedom can be the result of state legislation or political will. It is often the case, however, that religious freedom is curtailed by radical social forces to which the state gives free rein or does not call an adequate halt. At first glance this would appear to be a problem that occurs only in respect of other world religions. The activities of Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and the terrorist militias of the Islamic State outside Europe immediately spring to mind. The Islamic State “presents itself as an apocalyptic movement and talks of the end of all days, of the return of the caliphate and of its dominance of the world”³. The fact is, however, that Islamic fanatics have succeeded in winning over a hitherto unparalleled number of sympathisers worldwide⁴ and that Islamic terror and religiously motivated violence have long become a fact of life in Europe. Evidence of this has been provided in recent years not just in the form of terrorist assassinations executed with great military precision – the attacks in London, Madrid, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen and other cities have burned themselves into the European consciousness – but also in spontaneous acts of excessive violence, one of whose recent victims was Adam Armoush. The 21-year-old Israeli of Arab, Christian and Jewish origins was wearing a Jewish kippa or skull cap when he was attacked in Berlin by radical young Muslims.⁵

¹ Pew Research Center, Latest Trends in Religious Restrictions and Hostilities, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/02/26/religious-hostilities/> (16.06.2020).

² See T. Volk, *Christen unter Druck? Das Menschenrecht auf Religionsfreiheit ist nicht verhandelbar*, in: “Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Analysen & Argumente“ (2016) no. 202, p. 5.

³ AFP interview with Hassan Hassan: IS has built near-impenetrable base and mass appeal, reported 5 February 2015.

⁴ See M. Gehlen, *Die Zukunft des Nahen Ostens, Menschenrechte und Demokratieprozesse*, “Missio-Studienreihe Menschenrechte“, Aachen 2018, p. 5.

⁵ See L.Vgl. Backes, J. Fleischhauer, J. Friedmann, L. Gorris, S. Hammelehle, J. Lombard, *Krach im Kiez*, in: “Der Spiegel“ 2018, no. 18 (28 April) p. 14-20.

Incidentally, this attack took place just a few days after the album entitled “Young, Brutal, Good-looking” by Farid Bang and Kollegah received an Echo music award, even though critics had previously drawn attention to the lyrics on the album, which glorified violence and were anti-Semitic in part. The highly controversial presentation and the apparently religiously motivated attack on Adam Armoush raise the question of how free religion or religious fundamentalism in Germany can or must be, what relevance is attached to the respectful treatment of members of other religions in our society and to what extent the right to freely exercise one’s religion is properly guaranteed and protected in the country.

1. Religious Freedom as an Inalienable Fundamental Right

Religious freedom is guaranteed as a fundamental or human right in the Federal Republic of Germany. Every individual has the constitutional right to profess their religious belief or philosophical creed, to canvas for their belief or creed, to belong to a religious community and to convert from one religious or philosophical creed to another of their own free will. Article 4 of the German Basic Law (Constitution) states that “Freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, shall be inviolable.”⁶ This is followed by the sentence: “The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed.”⁷ The fathers of Germany’s Basic Law of 1949 thus incorporated into the constitution a fundamental right which had been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations the year before in Paris in Article 18 of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁸ In terms of constitutional law, at least, the question of religious freedom in Germany would thus appear to have been answered: freedom of religion, faith, conscience and worship are guaranteed as the four pillars of religious

⁶ Basic Law (Constitution) Article 4 (1).

⁷ Basic Law (Constitution) Article 4 (2).

⁸ Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance..“

freedom⁹ in Germany. This applies to both individual and collective exercise of the legal right and refers both to churches and Christian communities as well as to philosophical creeds, whose adherents might consider them not to be a religion.¹⁰

In addition to the enshrining of religious freedom in the Basic Law and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is of relevance in international law that Germany also signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Drafted ten years previously, this covenant came into force on 23 May 1976. Article 18 states in terms that are binding under international law: “(1) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. (2) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. (3) Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. (4) The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”¹¹

2. Religious Freedom as a Desideratum of Theology and Church

At the time this article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was drafted in 1966, various social circles were engaged in the debate on religious freedom. The year previously the Catholic Church had issued its declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, in which it came out emphatically in favour

⁹ See K. Hilpert, *Stichwort Religionsfreiheit*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (vol. 8), Freiburg 1999, 1048f.

¹⁰ See A. Liedhegener, *Religionsfreiheit als individuelles, kollektives und korporatives Grundrecht im liberalen Verfassungsstaat – für alle! Eine Erwiderung*, “Salzkörner” 18 (2012) no. 1, p. 10.

¹¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 16 December 1966.

of religious freedom. One of the key concepts formulated in *Dignitatis Humanae* is that of the dignity of the person. The document accepts that people have a dynamic relationship with themselves and sees the growing awareness of dignity of the person as a sign of the times. In theological terms *Dignitatis Humanae* ultimately constitutes a Copernican turn away from a “claim to the truth” towards a “claim to dignity of the person”.¹² The Council fathers state: “This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. [...] This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.”¹³

Dignitatis Humanae addresses the importance of religious freedom in both its positive and negative dimensions. Positive religious freedom describes the freedom of a person to found a religious community, to join a religious community, to publicly profess allegiance to a religious community and to participate in acts of worship or religious practices. Negative religious freedom is deemed to be the freedom of a person not to belong to any or to a certain religious community, to be able to leave a religious community at any time and not to be forced to participate in any acts of worship, ceremonies or other religious practices. Religious freedom encompasses freedom of faith, freedom of belief and freedom of worship. The Council fathers note that all people, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity or gender, have the right to freedom of religion, freedom of faith and freedom of worship. The Church explicitly advocates this human right not just for Christians, but also for Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of other religious faiths. Everybody must have the right to profess their belief freely and in public without having to fear persecution, discrimination or exclusion.

The Council fathers draw attention to the special responsibility of the state to guarantee and protect religious freedom, but they also say that other social groups are called upon to help protect it: “Therefore the care of the right

¹² See DH 1, DH 9.

¹³ DH 2.

to religious freedom devolves upon the whole citizenry, upon social groups, upon government, and upon the Church and other religious communities, in virtue of the duty of all toward the common welfare, and in the manner proper to each.”¹⁴ Furthermore, they point out that religious freedom is also a civil right which must not be withheld from Christians or non-Christians: “At the same time, the Christian faithful, in common with all other men, possess the civil right not to be hindered in leading their lives in accordance with their consciences. Therefore, a harmony exists between the freedom of the Church and the religious freedom which is to be recognized as the right of all men and communities and sanctioned by constitutional law.”¹⁵ As a theological reflection on religious freedom, the change of direction agreed by the Council fathers was nothing short of a Copernican turn. At the end of an international conference in Munich in December 2015 entitled “‘Opening’ the Council” some 200 theologians stated in their final declaration: “In recognising religious freedom as a human right the Second Vatican Council for the first time responded positively to the right to freedom in the modern era.”¹⁶

3. Anthropological Focus

As is also the case in international law, the Council document *Dignitatis Humanae* approaches the issue of religious freedom from an anthropological standpoint.¹⁷ The focus in the definition of religious freedom in international

¹⁴ DH 6.

¹⁵ DH 13.

¹⁶ Final Declaration of the International Congress on “‘Opening’ the Council” from 6 to 8 December 2015 at the Bavarian Catholic Academy in Munich. <http://www.das-konzil-eroffnen.de/schlusserklaerung> (16.06.2020).

¹⁷ Individual resolutions in the past have insinuated that protection must be afforded to religions as such, although in actual fact it is individual persons who are the focus of the right to religious freedom. This is readily apparent from Resolution 16/18 of the UN Human Rights Council entitled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence against persons based on belief” (Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 of 24 March 2011), in which it is stated clearly and unequivocally that it is persons who are to be protected. See H. Bielefeldt, *Streit um Religionsfreiheit. Aktuelle Facetten der internationalen Debatte*, in: *Erlangener Universitätsreden 77/2012*, vol. 3, p. 19.

law, as formulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is not on religion (a religious identity or religious feelings) but explicitly on the human person, whose dignity, rights and freedoms are to be respected.¹⁸ Thus the right to religious freedom does not refer primarily to religious organisations, institutions, religious beliefs and practices, but to the individual, whose dignity and freedom are to be protected.¹⁹ Moreover, religious freedom is granted to all people and not just to the adherents of established religions (or philosophical creeds), as is aberrantly asserted in numerous religions.²⁰ The 1993 General Comment of the UN committee monitoring the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights unequivocally emphasises the universal nature of religious freedom.²¹ Moreover, the definition of religious freedom also has a dimension of equality. Religious freedom is a right which accrues to all human persons on the grounds of their inalienable dignity and it must not be confined to certain social groups, members of specific religions, citizens of a certain state, etc. Finally, in accordance with the formulation set out in international law, religious freedom must be treated as a civil liberty which involves not only the right to freedom of conscience, religion, faith and worship, but also the right to freedom of education, assembly, etc.

4. The Fight for Religious freedom

Crucial for an understanding of the right to religious freedom is that it is an indivisible human right. The human right to religious freedom is formulated

¹⁸ See H. Bielefeldt, *Philosophie der Menschenrechte*, Darmstadt 1998.

¹⁹ See J. Tempermann, *Blasphemy, Defamation of Religion and Human Rights Law*, "Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights" 26 (2008) no. 4, p. 485-516.

²⁰ Whereas five religions (Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism and Taoism) are officially recognised in the People's Republic of China, for example, (and other movements such as Falun Gong are persecuted), Eritrea recognises membership of the Catholic, Lutheran, Coptic-Orthodox Church and Islam, Indonesia recognises Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism as religions, while Russia declares Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism to be the country's four traditional religions in its law on religions.

²¹ UN Human Rights Council, General Comment No. 22, Section 2 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=8&DocTypeID=11 (16.06.2020).

as a legal entitlement in respect of the state. It thus restricts the use of force by the state in that it rejects unjustified state interference and imposes a duty on the state to take measures to avert any possible infringement of religious freedom by third parties.

Problems can arise, in particular, because religious freedom is a civil liberty and not an unlimited freedom. On the contrary, it must be implemented in such a way that the freedom accorded to one individual does not excessively undermine the freedom granted to someone else. Conflicts are unavoidable. References to the indivisibility of human rights (of which the right to religious freedom is one) can neither exclude nor resolve many a dilemma that inevitably accompanies civil liberties. It goes without saying that civil liberties, which are included among human rights, can come into conflict with one another. This poses the challenge of weighing up the different legal entitlements and finding the right balance between them. In this process a fundamental distinction must be made between a *forum internum* and a *forum externum*. While the *forum internum* refers to someone's personal, inner conviction, the *forum externum* relates to the right to external expression of an inner conviction. As Heiner Bielefeldt has repeatedly pointed out, only the external manifestations of religious life (*forum externum*) can be subject to restrictions, whereas no limitations can be imposed on a person's inner convictions.²²

The struggle waged by a society to come to a proper understanding of religious freedom is not primarily an indication that religious freedom is in a precarious state in a certain country. On the contrary, the very fact that a struggle is waged at all over issues affecting religious freedom can be seen as a clear indication that the society concerned stands up for this human right. Active commitment to religious freedom – and particularly to the free exercise of religious beliefs by social minorities – is not something that is set in motion solely by a sense of ethic responsibility; it also has practical political consequences. The guarantee of religious freedom pays dividends in terms of the stability of a society and the quality of life it enjoys. It has been shown, for instance, that a limitation of religious freedom can be the cause of social

²² H. Bielefeld, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 23 December 2015, United Nations, General Assembly, printed matter: A/HCR/31/18, 4 and 9.

conflicts and that, on the contrary, advocacy of religious freedom has a positive impact on peaceful coexistence within a society.²³

What relevance an open-minded social debate on issues of religious freedom has, how a contribution can thus be made to ensuring that religious freedom is first fought for and then granted will become apparent as I take a look now at three prominent disputes.²⁴ These are the “crucifix ruling” of 1995 (which took on new relevance as a result of the crucifix debate triggered by Markus Söder in 2018²⁵), the discussion about the “wearing of a headscarf during school lessons” of 1999 (which resurfaced in 2017 thanks to the “We are not burka” remarks made by the former Federal Interior Minister, Thomas de Maizière²⁶) and the Federal Constitutional Court ruling on the question of “circumcision” in 2012 (which was debated again last year after the National Association of Statutory Health Physicians announced that some 46,000 circumcisions are performed annually in Germany on boys under the age of sixteen²⁷). All three are “classical” disputes that were discussed controversially some while ago but which have lost none of their topicality or social relevance in the meantime.

A look at the social debate on religious freedom in Germany is so important because religious freedom does not thrive on being considered monolithically in a conflict-free space. Religious freedom is far more fragile than would appear at first glance, and the very fact that a society is sensitive to the lines of conflict surrounding religious freedom, makes disputes transparent and conducts a social debate on these issues is undoubtedly a significant indicator showing that it is actively involved in guaranteeing the right to religious freedom for all.

²³ See B. Grim, R. J./Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied. Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge 2010.

²⁴ On the following see K. Vellguth, *Religionsfreiheit: Ein Recht lebt mit und durch seine Konflikte*, in: K. Krämer, K. Vellguth (eds.), *Religious Freedom. Foundations – Reflections – Models (One World Theology, Volume 5)*, Freiburg 2014, p. 363-380.

²⁵ See L.Vgl. Backes et al., op. cit., p. 14-20.

²⁶ See *ibid.*

²⁷ See <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/muslimische-soehne-beschneidung-kleiner-eingriff-grosse-fragen-1.3360303> (15.03.2018).

5. The Crucifix Dispute

On 10 August 1995, the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe published its judgment stating that the rule in the School Regulations for Primary Schools in Bavaria, whereby a crucifix was to be present in every classroom, was unconstitutional.²⁸ This stipulation, it said, was irreconcilable with Section 4 (1) of the Basic Law. The judges thus upheld the constitutional challenge of a mother and father from the Upper Palatinate, who considered the presence of a crucifix in the classroom to be an infringement of their right to religious freedom. The supreme judges (three of whom voted against the ruling) provided a precise and subtle analysis in passing their judgment, referring to the “degree of inevitability”, the “unavoidability of encountering the crucifix in classrooms” and the duration and intensity of the confrontation with the crucifix. The judges said in the reasons for their judgment: “The crucifix is the symbol of a certain religious belief and not merely an expression of Western culture which has been moulded in part by Christianity [...]. Any declaration by the state of a belief in the substance of this religion, to which third parties, among others, are exposed in their dealings with the state, impinges on religious freedom [...]. The crucifix remains one of the specific religious symbols of Christianity. It is in effect a religious symbol per se [...]. For non-Christians or atheists the crucifix – precisely because of the significance attaching to it in Christianity and in the course of history – has become a semiotic expression of certain religious beliefs and a symbol of their missionary dissemination. It would be a profanation running counter to the self-understanding of Christianity and of the Christian church if – as in the decisions under dispute – the crucifix were to be seen merely as an expression of Western tradition or as a ritual sign devoid of any specific religious connotation.”²⁹

As a convinced Catholic one may have cause to regret such a ruling, since it means the disappearance from the public space of a symbol that one personally deems important. However, the ruling passed down by the Constitutional Court can undoubtedly be seen in a more positive light, particularly as regards the question of how Germany addresses the question of religious freedom. For days the ruling by the Karlsruhe judges on crucifixes in school

²⁸ Section 13 (1), third sentence of the School Regulations for Primary Schools in Bavaria.

²⁹ http://www.sadaba.de/Rsp/RST_BfG_95_01_30.html (16.06.2020).

classrooms dominated the headlines and editorial comments in the regional and national newspapers, with passionate debates being conducted in readers' letters to the editors. Many of those who had always found the crucifix "irk-some" welcomed the Constitutional Court ruling, among them the founder of the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*, Rudolf Augstein, who said: "In future, crosses and crucified persons will no longer hang in state classrooms – in compulsory schools, at least."³⁰ Axel Freiherr von Campenhausen retorted: "The crucifix ruling points in the wrong direction. In a religiously neutral state with a pluralistic society it is not dissidents alone who have the right to impose their views."³¹ Meanwhile, Konrad Adam remarked in a conciliatory tone: "No matter which way you look at the Karlsruhe ruling, there is one thing that can be said in favour of it. It has made clear the irreconcilability of the objectives proclaimed in all innocence by the advocates of modernisation without them even suspecting a contradiction. But you cannot have both – strict orthodoxy and pluralism, multicultural nirvana and the Christian Occident, not even in down-to-earth Bavaria."³²

The debate spawned a wide range of arguments. A sign of the passionate nature of the public discussion was that, in its edition of 28 August 1995, *Der Spiegel* reserved its readers' letters section exclusively for letters to the editor on the crucifix ruling – in an age it referred to as "apparently tired of religion". The daily *Passauer Neue Presse* even published a 16-page special supplement entitled "Let the crucifixes hang". Peter Pappert drew attention to the positive aspect of this public discourse, saying: "It is astonishing that no German bishop has yet expressed his gratitude to the Federal Constitutional Court. If Karlsruhe had dismissed the challenge and decided the other way, the outcome would have been accepted, filed and forgotten. Now, however, a dispute is raging about the significance of the crucifix with an intensity and attention to detail that most Germans have never witnessed before. What more could the Church want?"³³

³⁰ R. Augstein, „Der Spiegel“ of 14 August 1995.

³¹ A. Campenhausen, V. Freiherr, *Karlsruhe fördert die Intoleranz*, "Rheinischer Merkur" of 18 August 1995.

³² K. Adam, *Kreuz ohne Tränen*, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" of 15 August 1995.

³³ P. Pappert, *Den Nerv getroffen. Engagierte Stimmen zum Kreuzifix-Urteil von Karlsruhe*, Aachen 1995, p. 9.

Apart from the fact that the debate about the crucifix ruling suddenly triggered a public debate on religious symbols and the importance of faith for the individual, it was also an important indicator of the way in which religious freedom is dealt with in Germany. First of all, it can be seen as positive that, in a country with a Basic Law whose preamble refers to God and in which religious instruction at school is enshrined, the guardians of the constitution should have questioned whether the symbol of Christianity per se is admissible in schools. This shows, firstly, that the constitution is not misconstrued as a clientele-based lobbying tool and, secondly, that the constitutional judges do not take account exclusively of the interests and (religious) rights and freedoms of the majority, but also of the religious minorities.

The public debate about whether the right to religious freedom in this particular case should be interpreted to mean that crucifixes had no place in classrooms was fiercely controversial at times. Some politicians called for the ruling to be seen as a vote for the complete separation of state and church and for rigorous implementation of that separation. Their demands were in all likelihood based more on the personal difficulties they had in accepting that religion is part of the public space and less on the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court, which argued in a more subtly differentiated manner. It is quite obvious that the principle of state neutrality in respect of religious and philosophical creeds provides no justification at all for the state to be declared a “religion-free zone” and for the conclusion to be drawn that there should be no place at all for the religious dimension in state schools. It is true, of course, that the state has a serious duty of care especially in schools attended by children and adolescents.³⁴ However, this duty of care must be interpreted in such a way that pupils are not one-sidedly indoctrinated in religious or philosophical terms but can freely come into contact with the religious dimension as well as with different religions. The consequences that can be drawn from this principle of state neutrality in respect of religious symbols such as the crucifix can certainly be viewed differently, as the minority vote of the three constitutional judges made clear. However, if we ignore for a moment the substance of the ruling at the material level and look at the way the debate evolved at the modal level, there can be no denying that it made a valuable contribution to raising social awareness of the need for sensitivity in matters of religious freedom at the heart of German society.

³⁴ See H. Bielefeldt, *Streit um Religionsfreiheit...*, op. cit., p. 27.

6. The Headscarf Dispute

On now to the next case. In 1999, four years after the “crucifix ruling”, the case of the Muslim teacher, Fereshta Ludin, caused a public stir in Germany. She was refused employment as a probationary civil servant in the teaching profession in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, because she insisted on wearing a headscarf during school lessons. The duty of a Muslim woman to cover her head can be derived directly from the Koran (sura 24, verse 31 as well as sura 33, verses 53 and 59), which is understood to mean that Muslim women should “wrap a portion of their headcovers over their chests” so that, on the one hand, they can be seen to be believers and, on the other hand, they are “not abused”. While Ludin, referring to the guaranteed right to religious freedom, pointed out that she should not be forbidden from wearing a headscarf, the responsible Stuttgart school authority argued that the headscarf was a symbol of cultural demarcation and thus not only a religious, but also a political symbol. This case, too, was finally brought before the Federal Constitutional Court. In its so-called “headscarf ruling” of 24 September 2003 it stated that Fereshta Ludin would indeed suffer an infringement of her basic rights if she were to be forbidden from wearing a headscarf: “In the context under assessment here the wearing of a headscarf makes clear the complainant’s adherence to the Islamic religious community and her personal identification as a Muslim woman. The qualification of such conduct as constituting a lack of suitability for the position of a teacher at primary and secondary schools interferes with the complainant’s right to equal access to every public office [...], since there is no sufficiently definite statutory basis in the current law.” Once again, this ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court was not unanimous, three of the eight judges voting against it. However, it stipulated that a Muslim woman teacher can only be prohibited from wearing a headscarf if this is clearly regulated in federal state law. A headscarf ban is now currently in force in eight federal states in Germany.³⁵

This case can be classified in different ways. Arguing from a gender-sensitive perspective, for instance, Heide Oestreich points out that the headscarf ban tends to discriminate against women and thus prevents them from

³⁵ Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Thuringia and Saarland have issued a ban on teachers in their schools wearing headscarves.

emancipating themselves from their parents or husbands.³⁶ Interestingly enough, Hakki Keskin, the former Federal Chairman of the Turkish Community in Germany, takes a diametrically opposed point of view, saying that the wearing of a headscarf by women teachers and the call for separate sports and swimming lessons for boys and girls has “nothing to do with Islam, which is by its very nature extremely tolerant”³⁷. He feels this was an attempt by numerically small groups within the Islamic population to exploit religion for political and ideological ends, a development he thought should be resisted. Irrespective of the interpretation of the subject matter, the lively headscarf dispute showed once again that religious freedom in Germany is an issue that is by no means fully resolved. On the contrary, conflicts occur in everyday life, for which a balanced solution taking due account of the legitimate right to religious freedom must repeatedly be found.

7. The Circumcision Dispute

In 2012, the German population witnessed a third dispute over the tolerance or acceptance of religious traditions. Most Jewish parents living in Germany today have their sons circumcised shortly after they are born (in reference to Gen 17:10-14)³⁸ by a *mohel* (Jewish circumciser). In the Jewish understanding, circumcision is the biblical sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. The ritual performance of this covenant of circumcision (Hebrew: *brit mila*) is regarded as one of the most important Jewish religious rules. By tradition it is the duty of a Jewish father to have his son circumcised on the eighth day after he is born.

³⁶ Oestreich, Heide, *Der Kopftuch-Streit. Das Abendland und ein Quadratmeter Islam*, Frankfurt 2005. See B. Beckmann-Zöller, *Der Schleier – Zeichen für Unterwerfung oder Hingabe in Islam und Christentum?*, “Die neue Ordnung” 72 (2018) no. 2, p. 96-107.

³⁷ W.G. Lerch, *Symbole und Religionsfriede*, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” of 19 January 2004.

³⁸ Genesis 17:10-12 states: “This is my covenant which you must keep between myself and you, and your descendants after you: every one of your males must be circumcised. You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that will be the sign of the covenant between myself and you. As soon as he is eight days old, every one of your males, generation after generation, must be circumcised, including slaves born within the household or bought from a foreigner not of your descent.”

In Islam, too, many Muslims regard the circumcision of the male member as a religious duty. A wide-ranging public debate on the legitimacy (and legality) of the circumcision of underage boys in Germany was triggered by the ruling of the Regional Appellate Court in Cologne. On 7 May 2012 it classified the circumcision of underage boys as bodily harm, which could not be justified by reference to the religious motives of the parents or the right to religious freedom, since the child's basic right to physical integrity prevailed over the right to religious freedom that accompanied the parents' right of education.³⁹ The ruling resulted in nationwide protests from the Jewish communities, which saw it as a massive infringement of their religious freedom.

The Central Council of Jews made its views known, as did the Christian churches. Heinrich Mussinghoff, then Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference Sub-Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, criticised the ruling, since "it in no way does justice to the constitutionally protected religious freedom of parents and their right of education. The contradiction between basic rights on freedom of religion and the well-being of the child brought up by the judges is not convincing in this particular case."⁴⁰

After the German Ethics Council had been consulted and a bill on the circumcision of boys⁴¹, which incorporated professional and medical opinions, had subsequently been debated in parliament, 434 members of the German Bundestag voted in favour of it on 12 December 2012 (with 100 no votes and 46 abstentions). The law stipulates that the circumcision of underage boys on religious grounds is permissible, provided (and this is where the criteria laid down by the Ethics Council come in) comprehensive information has been supplied to the holders of parental responsibility and approval given by them for proper

³⁹ See H.H. Henrix, *Die eigentliche Quelle ist das Herz Johannes' XXIII. Entstehung und Wirkung der Konzilerklärung "Nostra Aetate"*, "Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift" 161 (2013) no. 3, p. 291.

⁴⁰ German Bishops Conference, press release of 27 June 2012 – No. 101: Kritik am Urteil der Strafbarkeit von Beschneidungen: Bischof Mussinghoff: Gefahr für die Ausübung der Religionsfreiheit; <http://www.dbk.de/nc/presse/details/?presseid=2123> (16.05.2016). See G.M. Hoff, *Auf einem guten Weg. Zum Stand der Beziehungen zwischen katholischer Kirche und Judentum*, "Herder Korrespondenz" 69 (2015) no. 2, p. 84.

⁴¹ "Act on the Extent of Care for the Person of the Child in the Circumcision of Boys" of 12 December 2012, in: https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2012/41964402_kw50_sp_beschneidung-210212 (16.06.2020).

pain treatment to be provided, a competent performance of the intervention is guaranteed and no contrary expression of will has been voiced by the male child concerned.⁴² While the hopes of the Islamic community and the Jewish community were thus fulfilled, the German Academy for Children and Youth Medicine expressed criticism of the act because it could not see any medical value in the circumcision of underage boys. The academy referred in doing so to studies from America which reject any medical indication for circumcision.

This piece of legislation caused a furor in Germany and far beyond. The social debate that took place in the run-up to it was again very passionate. The arguments put forward by some made it clear that they attached very little significance to the right to religious freedom. The daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote in an editorial: “Any religion which includes regular bodily harm to minors [...] finds itself in permanent conflict with key constitutional objectives – the more drastically so, the more liberal and secular the state is.”⁴³ Just under a month later, Patrick Bahners took a different stance in the same newspaper. In its edition of 22 July he criticised the construction of a contradiction between the parental right of education and the fundamental right of the child to physical integrity, saying: “The parents appear to be the assailants here and so limits must be imposed on the arbitrary use of their power. However, the parental right of education is not a privilege to be asserted to the detriment of the child [...] nor] is it a right to self-fulfilment. The fact of the matter is that it is the right of the child to be educated by its own parents which enjoys constitutional protection.”⁴⁴ Just how vehement the discussion

⁴² The new Section 1631d of the Civil Code states under the heading “Circumcision of the male child”: “The care for the person of the child includes the right to give consent to the medically unnecessary circumcision of a male child who is not capable of reasoning and forming a judgment, if this is to be carried out in accordance with the rules of medical practice. This does not apply if the circumcision, even considering its purpose, jeopardises the best interests of the child. ... In the first six months after the child is born, circumcision may also be performed pursuant to subsection (1) by persons designated by a religious group to perform this procedure if these persons are specially trained to do so and, without being a physician, are comparably qualified to perform circumcisions.” http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_bgb/englisch_bgb.html#p5757 (16.06.2020).

⁴³ G.P. Hefty, *Strafbare Beschneidung*, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” of 29 June 2012, quoted from: M. Küntzel, *Kontaminiertes Terrain*, “Kirche und Israel” 27 (2012) no. 2, p. 177.

⁴⁴ P. Bahners, *Beschneidungsdebatte. Ein Rechenfehler*, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” of 2 July 2012, quoted from: H.H. Henrix, op. cit., p. 293.

was at the time is illustrated by the words of the former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, Israel Meir Lau, who – in view of the sudden sympathy felt for the supposed bodily harm inflicted on a Jew in Germany – said (and this highlighted the highly sensitive nature of the debate in Germany): “I never witnessed such sympathy in my childhood. The blood of a Jew wasn’t worth a thing and he could be trampled on by anyone wearing a Gestapo jackboot.”⁴⁵

Irrespective of the material assessment of the case, the modal observation of the social debate alone shows that, once again, a struggle was waged over the right to religious freedom, which is not something that is bestowed on a society with no effort required on its part but a right that can be secured by means of a clarifying debate.

8. Religious Freedom Thrives on Social Discourse

It may seem surprising that I should be presenting disputes over religious freedom here as models of the successful assertion of religious freedom. Moreover, I have cited three disputes in which members of the three Abrahamic religions felt that their religious freedom had been curtailed. However, it would be wrong to interpret religious freedom as meaning inter-faith harmony or a “state-protected harmony between religions”⁴⁶. Religious freedom can certainly be regarded as a “peace concept” for society. But religious freedom does not exist in an environment of relaxed harmony. On the contrary, like all freedoms it consistently finds itself involved in a competition between the freedom of one individual and the freedom of another. These competing freedoms must be treated on a case-by-case basis and be constantly balanced against each other if justice is to be done to religious freedom (which always refers to specific persons and is therefore individual and not general in character) and the individual’s justified entitlement to religious freedom which derives from it.

In the three disputes over religious freedom in Germany I have outlined here the focus was on the respective interests of Abrahamic religious

⁴⁵ Quoted from *Rituelle Beschneidung – Beschneidungsdebatte empört Israel* of 24 August 2012. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/rituelle-beschneidung-beschneidungsdebatte-empuert-israel-11867158.html> (16.05.2016).

⁴⁶ See H. Bielefeldt, *Streit um Religionsfreiheit. Aktuelle Facetten der internationalen Debatte*, “Erlangerer Universitätsreden” 77 (2012) no. 3, p. 52.

communities and the symbols and interests of their members. Whereas the crucifix ruling concerned the extent of the freedom Christians have to display their symbols in the public sphere, the issue at stake in the public debate over the female Muslim teacher wearing a headscarf was the extent to which Muslims should be allowed to wear their religious symbols in public. Finally, the focus in the circumcision debate, inter alia, was on the interests of the Jewish community, one of whose traditions is the circumcision of underage boys. Irrespective of whose right to religious freedom was at stake, all three cases caused a public stir. The question at issue throughout was the extent to which the individual's basic right to free exercise of his religion in a secular state can be limited by the state.

It is an encouraging sign that all three disputes in Germany were conducted with great verve and passion. It is also a good sign that the discussion of controversial issues was not stopped or “wound up”, but kept going. As regards the Muslim veil, one need only think of the “We are not burka” statement made by the former Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière, and with regard to the crucifix of the recent initiative taken by the Bavarian Prime Minister, Markus Söder, to ensure that a crucifix is hung in the entrance to every Bavarian public office.⁴⁷ And it is also a good sign that the participants in the discussions cannot be assigned to any overly inflexible and ideologically predefined positions. In view of Söder's “crucifix initiative” even “high-ranking Catholics”, such as the Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference, have voiced their criticism and warned of “division, unrest and conflict”. Volker Resing notes that this initiative can be regarded as an attempt to exclude dissenters and unbelievers.⁴⁸ Even the editor-in-chief of the right-wing conservative magazine *Kirche heute* notes that “state and church must keep a close eye on the right relationship between politics and church”⁴⁹, while the former President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Charlotte Knobloch, has responded positively to the decision of the Bavarian state government, saying: “Given the mammoth task of integration that we face,

⁴⁷ See L.Vgl. Backes, op. cit., p. 14-20.

⁴⁸ V. Resing, *Den Stein ins Rollen bringen. Söders Kreuz-Erlass: Politisches Vorpreschen und die Folgen*, “Herder Korrespondenz” 72 (2018) no. 6, p. 7.

⁴⁹ E.M. Fink, *Ein Fanfarenstoß. Bekenntnis der Bayerischen Staatsregierung zum Kreuz*, “Kirche heute” (2018) no. 6, p. 5.

I think it is right to define the norms and values that are indispensable for coexistence in our country and to insist on their acceptance.”⁵⁰ She points out that these include signs and symbols designed “to demonstrate our identity and characteristics”.

These remarks show that German society and the church have not lost sight of the fact that religious freedom is a crucial individual freedom it is worth arguing over. It is precisely this public debate or public dispute which ensures that religious freedom is adequately guaranteed in society. Of course you can argue in a particular case whether the solution found in the dispute over the upholding of religious freedom is “adequate” to the facts of the case and to the rights of the parties to the conflict. It could be that a different outcome to the debate or ruling was desirable. But the very fact that a public argument takes place at all is, on the one hand, an indication of a society in which religious freedom is deemed a precious asset and, on the other hand, a key factor in ensuring that religious freedom continues to be defined not just as a constitutional norm, but as something that can be realised or guaranteed as a practical legal right.

Moreover, religious freedom must continue to be fought for in fervent public debates. In view of migratory processes and the challenges posed by multi-religious and multi-cultural societies in Europe, religious freedom is essential for peaceful inter-cultural and inter-religious coexistence, which in the age of globalisation the state must assert and protect and society must continually discuss and practise.

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⁵⁰ Ch. Knobloch, *Quoted from Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Ludger, Kreuz, Macht und Ohnmacht. Zur Debatte um das Kreuz in Bayern*, “Herder Korrespondenz” 72 (2018) no. 6, p. 13-16.

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“We did not come to demolish the church but to build it up” Foreign Missionaries in The Netherlands

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According to *Ad Gentes* the responsibility for mission work is entrusted to the local church. But as mission of the Catholic, i.e. worldwide Church, mission has a universal dimension. For this reason, new churches should participate in the universal mission of sending missionaries to other parts of the world (Ad Gentes 20). This mission started with South – South mission and is now being supplemented with mission to Europe.¹

Previous research shows that foreign missionaries in the Netherlands are mainly working in territorial parishes, among Catholic immigrants and among believers of other faiths, but not among those who do not have faith or who criticize faith.² None of the international religious institutes that send missionaries to The Netherlands focus on what is usually seen as the core business of these institutes, the *missio ad gentes*, or primary evangelization.

According to one of the superiors secularism is a “bridge too far”, as secularism is difficult to understand for insiders and even more so for outsiders. The Netherlands is one of the most de-churched countries in Europe, but also

¹ M. Ueffing, *Catholic Mission in Europe 1910-2010* in: S. Bevans ed., *A century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Edinburg 2013, p. 34-43.

² F. Wijzen, *Foreign Priests in The Netherlands. Reversed mission, Mutual Assistance and International outsourcing* “Exchange” 45 (2016) no.1, p. 66-85.

one of the most spiritual.³ Grace Davie describes this as ‘believing without belonging’.⁴ The question that will be addressed in this chapter is: How do foreign missionaries in The Netherlands deal with secularism?

Controversies and contested claims

Missionary institutes in the Netherlands no longer send missionaries to former mission territories,⁵ but receive foreign missionaries to work in the Dutch society. This welcoming of foreign missionaries has been contested and is considered controversial, both from the perspective of the sending church,⁶ and the receiving church. One of the provincial superiors whom we interviewed said that his invitation to foreign missionaries to work in the Netherlands was contested by his Dutch fellow-priests within his own religious institute who argued that the young churches overseas have themselves a shortage of priests.

This reversed mission of foreign priests is not only contested within the religious institutes, but also in the Dutch church and society at large. Whereas “reversed mission” can be interpreted and justified as an expression of the “mutual missionary assistance of Churches”,⁷ Dutch Catholics ask themselves, what

³ Cf. J. de Hart, *Zoekende gelovigen: Oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit*. Amsterdam 2011, p. 2201. According to De Hart, between 32% and 42% of the Dutch population are not members of a church but ‘believe in something’. See also J. de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband. Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland*, Den Haag 2014, p. 25.

⁴ G. Davies, *Believing without belonging. Is this the future of religion in Britain?*, “Social Compass” 37 (1990) 4, p. 455-469.

⁵ There are few exceptions to this rule, particularly among nuns and lay missionaries. Of course, sending of old Dutch missionaries who return to ‘their mission’ after home leave, goes on.

⁶ At a symposium organized by the Nijmegen Institute of Mission Studies about this issue on 23 May 2003, Michael Amaladoss was critical about sending non-Western missionaries to Europe. According to him, missionary institutes should ‘graciously accept that they are dying’ and should not ‘import’ new missionaries as ‘cheap labor’ to ‘fill the gaps’. See M. Amaladoss, *Mission Institutes in the Millennium*, in: F. Dokman (ed.), *The West and the Rest of the World in Theology. Mission and Co-Funding*, Nijmegen 2005, p. 66-89. In their responses to Amaladoss, published in the same booklet, Elsy Varghese and Ben supported the idea of sending non-Western missionaries to Europe.

⁷ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Nuntiandi”*.

is the “assistance” that foreign priests bring, and in what way is it “mutual”? And, assuming that “reversed mission” can be compared with outsourcing in international businesses, and outsourcing is based on the principle of demand and supply, people ask, what is the demand, or whose demand is it?⁸ Foreign priests are compared with clerics within Muslim communities, brought from Turkey and Morocco, who are estranged from the Dutch situation, and are in need of civic integration courses.⁹

A pamphlet entitled *Church and Ministry* that is popular among progressive Catholics, distributed by the Provincial and Council of the Dutch Province of the Dominicans mentions among others “importing priests from abroad” as a strategy of the “Church authority” to meet the shortage of priests and to reduce the number of “Services of Word and Communion” in the parishes. It notes that “many church communities are, to say the least, unhappy with this situation”.¹⁰

On the one hand Dutch Catholics understand that “reversed mission” is a consequence of a globalizing world and church. On the other hand, they do not accept that their church and country are seen as a “mission territory”, and that they are only at the receiving end, and no longer have something to offer to the world.¹¹ Simply reversing the “one-way street” sign is not “mutual” either. Also, other studies which were conducted in countries including Germany

⁸ F. Wijsen, op. cit., p. 66-85.

⁹ See D. Haag, *Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties* 2001; M. Tjissen, *Inburgering van geestelijke bedienaren. Een bijzonder doelgroep of gewoon nieuwkomers?* in: “*Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid*”, 5 (2014) no. 3, p. 42-54. Recently government funding for civic integration courses for clerics was terminated.

¹⁰ See Bestuur Nederlandse Dominicanen, *Kerk en ambt: Op weg naar een kerk met toekomst*, Nijmegen 2007. A translation in English circulates widely on the internet, for example, on the ecumenical website of resources and reflections on liturgy, spirituality, and worship for individuals and communities, http://www.liturgy.co.nz/worship/matters_assets/Church_and_Ministry.pdf, (2.05.2014). In 2015 this website was closed.

¹¹ Already in their preliminary report for their 1993 *Ad Limina* visit to the Pope, the Dutch bishops suggested that The Netherlands had become mission country. Some of the progressive Catholics discussed the use of the term ‘mission’. Among others, see E. Borgman, *De missionaire opdracht van de Nederlandse kerken*, “De Bazuin”, 12 maart 1993; R. van Rossum, *Over welke missie gaat het bij ‘Nederland Missieland?’*, “Trouw”, 21 januari 1993.

and the United States,¹² show that there is an ambiguity or uneasiness in the relation between foreign priests and the receiving churches.¹³

There is also an ambiguity and uneasiness on the side of the foreign missionaries. Some of them came to the Netherlands to convert Dutch people, e.g. to bring back the gospel to those who forgot about the gospel. They are well aware of the paradox, that it was often Dutch missionaries who brought the gospel to them,¹⁴ e.g. to the “young Churches” in the southern hemisphere for which they are very grateful. Once they are here they discover that many Dutch people are no longer members of the church or know about the gospel, but that they are deeply spiritual and do a lot of charity work.¹⁵ It goes without saying that the group of foreign missionaries is not homogeneous. They come from different religious institutions and different countries, and their views of church and mission vary accordingly.

¹² For the German study, see K. Gabriel, S. Leibold, R. Ackermann, *Die Situation ausländische Priester in Deutschland*, Ostfildern 2011; K. Gabriel, *Ausländische Priester in der deutschen Kirche: Zwischen Notlösung und welt-kirchlicher Avantgarde, Lebendige Seelsorge*, “Zeitschrift für praktisch-theologisches Handeln” 65/1 (2014), p. 2-7. For the American study, see D.R. Hoge, A. Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities*, Minnesota 2006; D.R. Hoge, A. Okure, *International Priests in America. Two Coming Issues*, “New Theology Review” 2006, May issue, p. 14-22.

¹³ See J. van Butselaar, *An Uneasy Relationship: ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Churches in Western Europe*, in: K. Bediako (ed.), *A New Day Dawning: African Christians Living the Gospel*, “Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum” (2004), p. 179-192. This article deals with immigrant communities within the Netherlands Protestant Church, but the ‘uneasiness’ applies also to the reversed mission of foreign priests in the Catholic Church.

¹⁴ As is shown below, the Dutch Church had an overwhelming number of missionaries working in mission territories between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council. Three factors explain this historical fact. Whereas traditional missionary countries such as France and Germany had to restore their economies after the First World War, the Netherlands did not have this problem as it had remained neutral during the First World War. Moreover, due to a new constitution that guaranteed equal treatment of religions, the Catholic community was emancipating itself from the Protestant domination at that time, and world-wide mission boosted the Catholic identity. Last but not least, the then Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* was Dutch.

¹⁵ See A. Kunnekkadan, *Nederlanders zijn diep in hun hart spiritueel*, “Informatiedienst. Woord en Wederwoord”, juni 2011, p. 6.

Quantitative data

Between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council missionary institutes in the Netherlands sent an overwhelming number of missionaries to the mission territories. In 1950, 1 out of 550 Dutch Catholics was working as a missionary overseas, and 1 out of 9 Catholic missionaries in the world was Dutch.¹⁶ But, since the beginning of the 21st century, this mission has been reversed. The number of foreign missionaries working in The Netherlands has more than doubled over the past seven years,¹⁷ as the following table shows.

	2006	2013	2014	2016
priests	45	101	109	95
brothers	10	19	18	17
active nuns	109	292	288	263
contemplative nuns	21	61	74	66
total	185	473	489	441

Source: Database Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes.

In 2014, 8,83% of the total number of members of religious institutes (N=5538) was “foreign”, in 2016 9,3% of the total number (N=4717) of members of religious institutes was “foreign”. The database of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes does not distinguish between European and extra-European foreigners, but it is estimated that two thirds of the foreigners are extra-European. The enormous growth over the past years can partly be explained by the fact that some provinces of Netherlands religious institutes merged with other European provinces which caused mobility within these provinces. About one fifth of the foreign missionaries are involved in the administration of their religious institutes. And again, one fifth of the foreign missionaries belong to new religious institutes that were founded outside the

¹⁶ See A. Camps, V. Poels, J. Willemsen, *Dutch Missionary Activities*. Nijmegen 2005. In 1968 there were about 10,000 Dutch missionaries working overseas. Among others, this history has been described by J. Roes, *Het groote missiejaar 1915-1940: Op zoek naar de missiemotivatie van de Nederlandse katholieken*, Bilthoven: Ambo 1974; J. Derix, *Brengers van de Boodschap: Geschiedenis van de katholieke missionering vanuit Nederland van voc tot Vaticanum ii*, Nijmegen 2009.

¹⁷ ‘Foreign’ is defined here as ‘born outside The Netherlands’.

Netherlands.¹⁸ These statistics are not complete because not all new religious institutes are members of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes, and their foreign missionaries are not included in the database. Also, foreign priests and nuns working in dioceses are not included in these statistics.

If we look at individual religious institutes, the Dutch Province of the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) has 47 members in the Netherlands of which 9 are from Asia and 1 from Latin America. The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) has 59 members in the Netherlands – Belgium Province out of which 18 are from Asia and Africa.¹⁹ The Congregation of the Holy Ghost (CSSp) has 60 members in The Netherlands; 44 of them are Dutch and 16 are African.

At the European level, the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) has 754 members in Europe from which 79 members are non-Europeans, that is 10.5 percent.²⁰ Out of 79 members mentioned above 62 are from Asia.²¹ The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) has 250 foreign missionaries working in Europe out of a total of 1126 SVD missionaries in Europe.

Qualitative data

How do the foreign missionaries themselves experience and understand mission in Europe? Here I refer to three of them in an exemplary way, namely Sr. Melina Polo SSpS from the Philippines, Fr. Avin Kunnekadan SVD from India, and Fr. Charles Eba'a CSSp from Cameroon.

Sr. Melina Polo came to the Netherlands in 1991. She had a preference to be sent to Papua New Guinea, but she was appointed to the Netherlands. "After such an appointment we may think about it for two weeks. I was unsure,

¹⁸ See further G. Moorman, *Learning What it Means to be Part of the Multicultural Body of Christ*, "Exchange" 41 (2012) no. 1, p. 71-73.

¹⁹ Worldssps, *Personnel Distribution*, 31 December 2016, <https://www.worldssps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slide2.jpg> (12.10.2017). Erica Op'T Hoog, "De SVD werkt aan de toekomst: In gesprek met de oude en de nieuwe Provinciaal," *KNR bulletin*, 5 March 2017, 5.

²⁰ Worldssps, *Personnel Distribution*, 31 December 2016, <https://www.worldssps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slide2.jpg> (12.10.2017).

²¹ A. Brand, *Address to the Euro-Assembly of Provincials/Regionals and Formators*, in Official communications 210 (Rome: General Administration Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit, 2003), p. 3.

afraid for the unknown. Of course, The Netherlands is different from Papua New Guinea. Europe is more difficult. We had heard about secularization, but what was it? That people find it more difficult to speak about God. But how? That was the idea that I came with. Now I experience it myself, now I know what secularization is". After she came to the Netherlands she started to study theology so she could have a better understanding of what the situation was, and what to do as a missionary sister. "In my own country, the task was rather easy to find: catechesis, recollection. In the Netherlands this could not be done in the same way". When she started with a bible group, the interest was not that big. "People wished to read the bible, but in a different manner: they prefer bible study above bible sharing". And she continued, "In the Netherlands we do not like vagueness. A pastor must be down to earth. Dutch people want to keep the faith for themselves; it must not be too expressive". In a bible group she experienced that people preferred bible study rather than bible sharing. It shows that people prefer intellectual discussions above showing the bible text and how it relates to their life. When asked how she looks at mission in Europe, she says: "Those who go as missionaries to Europe don't need to bring money ... Not action is central that much, but accompanying people, be with them, and walk with them on their paths". She specifies further, "You are challenged to share your faith, not only with people who still go to church, but also with others. The Dutch experience their faith by helping people, not that much by going to church. And of those who do go to Church, you cannot always say that they are social-minded". Asked whether she has changed as a religious sister living in the Netherlands she says, "I have got a broader horizon ... I appreciate the openness of Dutch people. I learned not to judge the life of others. The intention of mission cannot lie in putting up structures which are not yet present. And to conclude she says. "I don't need to talk about God always and everywhere. I may not force others to share my faith. This cannot be. Every person has his relation to God. I have to appreciate it. And sometimes, I experienced, I can learn from this."²²

Fr. Avin Kunnekkadan came to the Netherlands in 2005. He describes his initial experience as follows. "In India I had my regular job, a certain status as

²² Liever bijbelstudie dan 'bible sharing', interview with T. Boesten, *Kerk Wereldwijd*, 2016, p. 14-16; Van de mensen leerde ik wat ik met hen aan goeds kan doen, in: *Mensen met een Missie, Op Vaste Grond*, Week Nederlandse Missionarissen, 2002, p. 61-68.

a religious missionary which I lost here in the beginning. I was used to working in a fixed structure within the institutionalized church. I had my own identity. As it was lost it was very painful ... I was helpless and had to begin anew like a child ... The emptiness within and the loneliness and helplessness made me sad". According to Fr. Kunnekkadan, the situation in Europe calls for a new way of doing mission, "to be a religious missionary in Europe is to be closer to the people, particularly the poor and strangers and faith seekers. To belong to them, to the seeking people, and listen, share their concerns and give them some hope in life was the new way." Although he defines himself as a missionary, he understands his task "not to convert" people, because in his view, "the Dutch are Christian enough. There is a lot of neighbor love and charity. People help each other and collect money for philanthropic aims", but to bring everyone together as a family. Asked to describe his missionary priesthood in the Netherlands he says, "building bridges is an important part of it ... I find building bridges important ... building bridges between people diverse people and cultures and forms of spirituality, encourages us to creativity".²³ What he admires of the Dutch is their openness. "If you are gay or prostitute you do not need to keep it secret, like in India". Asked about gay marriage he says it is "up to the Bishops to decide", but in his parish gay are welcome. They are also "Children of God. They belong to the Catholic family". Asked about other liberal values in the Netherlands, such as euthanasia, he says "Difficult issue. If you suffered from cancer for many years ... Not long ago a parishioner who was severely ill came to me to talk about euthanasia. I talked with the whole family. As a pastor I said to them: support and accompany each other. Pain and suffering are also part of life.

Fr. Charles Eba'a came to The Netherlands in 2006. After his study of philosophy in Gabon and theology in Nigeria, he wanted to work in Brazil or Belgium, because he already knew French, but he was sent to The Netherlands. "What I knew about the Netherlands was that it was the land of euthanasia and other strange things, legalized prostitution, a lot of water

²³ A. Kunnekkadan, *HIRCOS: A Roscommon Experiment*, in: M. Ueffing (ed.) *Interculturality*, Sankt Augustin 2013; "Deze niet-westerse voorgangers komen ons het geloof brengen," interview with Willem Pekelder in *Trouw* October 14, 2017, p. 11; *Missionair in de parochie*, in: *Kerk aan de Waterweg*, "Magazine van de Parochie De Goede Herder", najaar 2014, p. 12; *Missieproeftuin en het religieuze leven*, in: S. Kuppens e.a., *15 jaar Missionair Project*, Den Haag.

and cold weather. And I knew that there were many Muslims in The Netherlands". Asked about his first experiences he says, "The lack of spontaneity and joy in the Church is big in The Netherlands. There is quite some piety, but this exists in quiet modesty. This will not last long". Asked what his answer to this would be he says, "Bring back joy to the church". "Christianity that was brought to Africa from Europe is fading away. As African you ask yourself whether this was fake, whether they [Europeans] now reject what they [Europeans] brought to Africa. But you can also look at in a different way. Now the African Church is blossoming. She [the African Church] can help Europe in its turn to make sure that the faith bears fruit here". In the past, the older generation has criticized the church, and they left the church behind them. They let the ecclesial structures collapse. Now the youngsters remain with empty hands. "I want to bring back the faith in a way that fits the present time". But, "this is not only a task for priests", says Fr. Eba'a. "The church in Europe must learn that being Church does not depend on the presence of clerics. If you gather with few people as Christians – with two or three in his Name – you can be Church. Just do it together". In the beginning it was not easy for him. "I found it difficult to accept how children spoke to their parents, at the same level, without respect. And in the church, I could not get used to women who were leading liturgical services in the church. This was really shocking". However, his experience in the parish made him open-minded. "Now I appreciate if I am present when a woman leads the service ... the stage of tolerance is past. Now it is acceptance". Asked how the Netherlands' culture changed him he says, "I am now more open to the world. If I am back in Cameroon, I have more difficulty with the hierarchy and how homosexuals and lesbians are there looked at". His missionary life is nurtured through interaction with young people and visiting families. "I think that it is important that the church goes where the people are, to places where the action; then people can discover in you what the church is".²⁴

²⁴ Thuis geraakt, Jan Franken in gesprek met Charles Eba'a, in *VPWinfo*, December 2016, p. 6-7; Zaaen op een plek waar het vuur van het geloof bijna uitgaat. Interview van Dick Vos met Charles Eba'a. In *Spinet. Spiritijns Nederlands Tijdschrift*, November 2017, p. 9-12.

Presence, Project and Diakonia

From the 1970s onwards, religious institutes in the Netherlands developed an approach that could be described as “Christian presence” in harmony with the spirituality of Charles de Foucault.²⁵ So, when these institutes invited foreign missionaries to the Netherlands they wanted them not “to do many things”, but simply “to be there”.²⁶ The foreign missionaries, however, came from churches that are mainly project-oriented. Coming from so-called developing countries, many of them saw mission primarily in terms of offering social services to people in need.²⁷

Sr. Polo says that “foreign missionaries don’t need to bring money”. But, “the dimension of social justice is included in it [presence]. Also, in the Netherlands there is much to do in this field”. And, “The Netherlands may be a rich country with a well-organized social system. But also, in the Netherlands there are poor people. People who have to struggle for life ... For those people I want to be present”.²⁸ By offering social services to people in need it is seen as a way to make present the gospel values in peoples’ lives. The missionaries are always ready to answer anyone who asks them to explain the hope they have in them (1 Peter 3:35). The foreign missionaries, however, do not make the distinction between “sacramental” and “social” ministry. Coming from non-Western cultures, they tend to think in more holistic terms. They speak about “integral development”, in which material and spiritual development, development of body and soul, go together.

In a well-fare state, material needs are catered for by the government. Due to neo-liberal politics, the state’s social services are minimized, and churches fill in the gaps. The tragedy is that Dutch priests think that immigrants and

²⁵ Cf. R. van Rossum et al., *Op zoek naar sporen van God*, vol. 2, The Hague: CMBR 2004; G. Moorman (ed.), *Charles de Foucauld: Missionaire presentie toen, nu en in de toekomst*, Nijmegen 2006.

²⁶ One of the foreign missionaries, however, noted a paradox. The foreign or ‘new’ missionaries have become the ‘project’ of the old Dutch missionaries.

²⁷ One of the ‘old’ missionaries noted that there is no contradiction between presence and project. Presence (or insertion into the local situation) is a necessary stage in developing a project. New missionaries argue that this stage is repeated again and again by new foreign missionaries, so there seems little continuity and stability.

²⁸ See *Liever Bijbelstudie dan ‘bible sharing’*, 16; *Van de mensen leerde ik*, 65.

people at the underside of the society need social ministry, but these people increasingly go to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches where their spiritual needs are taken seriously.²⁹

Parish, Mission, Missionary Parish

Because of the emphasis on “presence”, until recently it was common practice in the Netherlands, members of religious institutes did not take responsibility for parishes. Many Dutch missionaries – who returned home after serving as missionaries overseas – did not see it as their primary task to “fill in the gaps” in parishes, but to perform extra-ordinary ministries in addition to parishes. In many cases they set up a parallel structure.

However, most foreign male missionaries are trained in their seminaries to be parish priests.³⁰ They do not see a conflict between parish and mission, but tend to think in terms of missionary parishes, or pastoral mission, in accordance with the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*.³¹

In their view, if parishes were run by missionaries they would simply duplicate the existing parishes, indeed they would not add anything to traditional parish structures. But foreign missionaries want to show alternatives and add their own voices to the plurality of voices in the church.

In contrast to the diocesan priests, who tend to focus on herding the “church-goers”, foreign missionaries focus more on the “lost sheep”, or “spiritual seekers”³² Fr. Kunnekkadan concludes, “We can use the parish structure to be present ... By being present in parishes we are more visible and we can be more open”.³³

²⁹ See J. Maaskant, *Afrikaan en Katholiek in Rotterdam: Waar kerk je dan*, Nijmegen 1999, p. 98.

³⁰ In one case a foreign missionary narrated that his superior failed to organize a courtesy visit to the local bishop. So, he organized it himself.

³¹ See John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate Redemptoris Missio*, no. 34.

³² Cf. J. de Hart, *Zoekende gelovigen...*, op. cit., p. 2201. According to De Hart, between 32% and 42% of the Dutch population are not members of a church but ‘believe in something’. See also J. de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband...*, op. cit.

³³ See: De SVD werkt aan de toekomst

Spirituality and community life

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

Coming mostly from non-Western societies which are perceived as more communitarian, new missionaries want to show in the Dutch context that community life is valuable. “In the Netherlands there is a lot of loneliness”, says Fr. Kunnekkadan. Therefore, they stress the value of family and family ministry.

Moreover, the new missionaries who have lived in the Netherlands for a longer period of time understand that most Dutch people are not secularists, atheists or even agnostics, but “spiritual seekers”. As Fr. Kunnekkadan says, “deep in their heart the Dutch are spiritual”.³⁴ What is lacking in the Church is happiness and a sense of humour. “In Cameroon faith was a feast ... This is lacking in The Netherlands”, says Fr. Eba’a. “Not without reason evangelical Churches in The Netherlands attract more people”.³⁵

Epilogue

Bishops who invite religious institutes and foreign missionaries to work in their dioceses expect a revitalization of the local church. The little evidence that we have got suggests that this has not happened. A critique is that the foreign missionaries are not so visible in the Church.³⁶

The question that was addressed in this chapter was: How do foreign missionaries in The Netherlands deal with secularism? First, secularism is not easy to be defined, and most foreign missionaries experienced that secularism does not necessarily signify unbelief. Many Dutch are spiritual and support

³⁴ See Kunnekkadan, *Nederlanders zijn diep in hun hart spiritueel*.

³⁵ See Zaaïen op een plek, 10-11.

³⁶ See J.C. Guerra, *Niet voor kerkgebouwen maar voor de mensen. Een onderzoek naar de inzet van nieuwe missionarissen in het missionair-diaconaal pastoraat in de Schilderswijk*, Nijmegen 2018, p. 37.

charity works. Foreign missionaries are not encouraged to address the issue of secularism by their religious superiors. According to them it is almost impossible for foreign missionaries to get accustomed to secularization. It is a bridge too far.

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

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"We did not come to demolish the church but to build it up." Foreign Missionaries in The Netherlands

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Evangelizare media misit nos – Proclamation of the Gospel on the Digital Continent

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Introduction

It was the year 2002. The last visit of Pope John Paul II to Poland was slowly coming to an end. At the Pope's special request, the time of his personal visit to the cathedral in Krakow was planned. For 14 years, it was his cathedral. Before leaving Poland he wanted to pray in silence at the relics of the saints who are buried there. He arrived to the cathedral around 18.15. When he entered, he stopped at the sarcophagus (coffin with the relics) of St. Stanislaus. There he sat down in the chair and quietly recited the Liturgy of the Hours. Beside him stood a priest who brought him a lamp so that he could read the breviary. The Pope, from time to time, looked up at the sarcophagus, and at times he supported his head with his hand. The breviary took him about 35 minutes. After finishing, he went to the Wawel Cross, stopped at the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament and then at the great altar of coronation of the kings of Poland, at which he used to celebrate Masses and services. Then, after about 45 minutes, he left the cathedral. At that time, he was accompanied by few members of the cathedral chapter and ... by cameras.

When he sat in the chair and the breviary was given to him, silence fell and the TV commentator stopped speaking. The Pope prayed Vespers and state television filmed this ... silence. Time was passing, one minute, two, five, fifteen... the cameras began switching from the Holy Father to the sarcophagus of Saint Stanislaus, and sometimes other priests. After some time, the cameraman found a good prospect for the Pope with a bouquet of flowers standing

next to him. And it was only after 25 minutes, that the commentator said few words. These were the last hours of John Paul II during his last pilgrimage to Poland, and it was obvious that the television will continue to broadcast these events. But how is television, which by nature does not tolerate silence, supposed to show prayer in silence? Although there was no commentary said, the cameras almost “screamed” to drown out this silence. It was probably the most appealing half an hour of silence in the history of television, at least in Poland.

This event can be an example of the tension between two “worlds” – Christian prayer and new medias. It is not easy and obvious how to proclaim the Gospel in the world of the new social medias. But there cannot be any doubt that to be a Christian means to try to proclaim Jesus Christ in every place and culture. The five classical missionary mandates express this desire to proclaim the Good News about Jesus “to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15, see also Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-23; Acts 1:8).

Let us start our analysis with the story from the Acts of the Apostles. When Paul was planning his further activities, something important happened. He wanted to stay on the territory, which he already knew, in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey). But “one night Paul had a vision: a Macedonian appeared and kept urging him in these words, ‘Come across to Macedonia and help us.’ Once he had seen this vision we lost no time in arranging a passage to Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to bring them the good news” (Acts 16:9-10). In today’s challenge of new digital continent we may see the image of the same call, which Paul heard 2000 years ago: “come across the digital ocean and help us”.

Reflection since Vatican II

With the famous decree “Inter Mirifica” (1963) of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church officially spoke, for the first time in its history in such an important document, about mass communication. It was Pope John XXIII who introduced this topic to the Council. Later, in 1975, Pope Paul VI wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Nuntiandi” (No. 45), that the Church would “feel guilty before the Lord” if she did not use these tools to proclaim the Gospel.

The new tools of mass social communication began to dominate today’s world during the pontificate of John Paul II. We mention here just two of his

documents. In the encyclical “Redemptoris missio” (1990) he presented the perspective of the “new evangelization” and the modern equivalents of the Areopagus (new cultural sector of life) of Church’s mission in today’s world¹. To be sure there is nothing wrong with the “old” evangelization, but since the world is changing, so has to change also some ways of evangelization. In the talk to Latin American bishops (on 24th of March 1983) John Paul II explained more that this “new evangelization” has to be “new” in three senses: in “its ardor, methods and expression”. Evangelization through the means of the social media has to use new methods and new expressions and it requires new ardor from the contemporary missionaries.

The second document of John Paul II, the Apostolic Letter “Rapid Development” (24th of January 2005) was one of the last documents of the dying John Paul II. He wrote (signed) it being already very sick and conscious that is dying soon (two months later). This perspective gives special light on the will of Pope, who wanted to sign it, anyway. Generally John Paul II looked upon the new means of communication in a very positive way (perhaps he was even too optimistic). He regarded the rapid development of technology of social medias as one of the signs of progress in today’s society. This new reality poses one of the most demanding challenges for the Church of today. It is not only a question of using mass media to spread the Gospel, but “to integrate the message of salvation into the ‘new culture’ that these powerful means of communication create and amplify” (no. 2).

Pope Benedict XVI coined the new expression – the “digital continent”. He started to reflect on it in address to the Plenary Assembly Session of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication (29th of October 2009). For deeper reflection it is good to analyze his eight messages for the World Day of Social Communication, especially for year 2009 and 2010².

He invited young people (not only, but particularly them) to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of the “digital continent”. He repeated this expression also in the next year underlining this issue even in the sub-title

¹ The first Areopagus is the world of the new mass media (cf. no. 37 C).

² See more: B. Bilicka, *Chrześcijański styl obecności na „cyfrowym kontynencie” w orędziach Benedykta XVI [The Christian way of presence on the “digital continent” in the messages of Benedict XVI]*, “Forum Teologiczne” 16 (2015) p. 139-151, see: <http://wydawnictwo.uwm.edu.pl/uploads/documents/czytelnia/forum/forumXVI.pdf> (05.11.2018).

“Ministry in a Digital World”.³ Against those who are afraid of these new means of communication he looked at the large variety of possibilities in using these means of communication in the service of the Word of God. He wrote among others: “The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul’s exclamation: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16).” On the other hand, of course, he was aware of dangers.

One of the most symbolic days in this evangelization of the “digital continent” could be the day of 12th of December 2012, when Benedict XVI sent his first “Tweet” from the *@Pontifex* account. Today, the Twitter account of Pope Francis ranks among the most often visited in the world.

Starting point of missiological reflection

In missiological reflection we are aware that the missionary has to be able to adjust to every new reality. In the long mission history, we can see how the Church was able to use the means of communication available at that time. In antiquity it was well developed network of Roman roads in Europe and the Silk Road in Asia. Later, the media of that time such as handwritten texts were copied by monks and other scholars to disseminate Sacred Texts and other important and theological works.

Many texts were translated and the common heritage of faith was enriched in new languages. In middle Europe we pay special attention to the work of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who developed the Cyrillic alphabet in the ninth century in purpose of reaching Slavic people. In the fifteenth century the new possibilities came with development of the printing press. Later, *Polyglotta Vaticana* became one of the first publishing houses printing in many languages. The same was true with development of radio and television.

Sometimes these new “worlds” required not only using new means, but also changing the lifestyle of the missionary. Matteo Ricci in China of the end of sixteenth and beginning of seventeenth century decided to change his

³ Benedict XVI, Message for the 44th World Communication Day “The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word”, in: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100124_44th-world-communications-day.html (29.08.2018).

style of life and follow customs of Chinese mandarins. He had to learn their language, studied Chinese literature, dressed as local people. Today we need similarly “digital missionaries” of such kind, who will be both specialists in technological matters and also will be able to transmit faith in this new world. Every culture has their rights, their customs, their language. As in the case of contact of the Gospel with other cultures of Asia or Africa, certain customs will be accepted and creatively developed, others will be indifferent, but there will also be those who cannot be accepted and for whom meeting the Gospel is a great challenge. Today the perspective changed. We do not go out “some-where overseas”. This new “digital” work of interconnections is among us. It is “our”, we breathe it like air.⁴

Some characteristics of language and customs of the “digital continent” (and “digital religion”)

As much as the missionaries of the past had to learn the languages and customs of the new continents, so we have to do today. On this new continent also our “religiosity” is changing somehow. We do not know yet how.

The introduction of the microphone freed the preacher from the high pulpit and from the necessity to shout. He did not have to stand “above heads” of the praying community and did not have to shout to be heard. Now he can stand closer to the audience, can speak more casually, and explore intimacy and conversation as values in authentic communal religious experience. Introduction of microphone changed the idea of preaching the catechetical sermons into more personal homilies (with good and sometimes not good consequences). The art of the proclamation of the Gospel on digital continent requires different capabilities.

⁴ As it was summarize by Jaclyn S. Parrish: “There was a time when the thought of international missions conjured up images of a complete and irrevocable break with the familiar world: a hut on the savannah, a shack in a Chinese village, a boat on the open ocean. But as the twenty-first century dawned, we found ourselves at sea on stranger tides. Today, Maasai warriors exchange money with their cellphones. Refugees livestream their journeys across the Mediterranean. News of terrorist attacks breaks on Twitter moments after the bombs explode.” – See J.S. Parrish, *Missions in the Digital Age: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, in: <https://www.imb.org/2017/08/07/missions-digital-age-good-bad-ugly/> (07.08.2017).

It is too early to analyze fully the language and customs (habits) of the “Digital Natives” but slowly we start to see some signs how do “they” live, what languages do they speak, what customs do they follow. Digital Natives value more freedom of expression, democratization of knowledge, creation and dissemination, and opportunities to play with, or create new, personal identities. With the introduction of hypertext, the experience of reading media text on computers was affected by at least two significant changes. Hypertext allowed readers to (choose to) move beyond the single page. Readers do not just interact with text through sight but also through sound, and also with the act of “clicking a mouse” or of “touching with a finger.”

The question for missiological reflection is how it is changing our understanding of life of faith? As it was true with other continents, the “digital faith” is also full of myths. Some of them are about the possibilities of human redemption, freedom and the possibility of becoming more godlike in a new way. Among them there are some about relationship between technology and spirituality.

As beautiful and powerful as it is, this new digital continent also needs Christ’s redemption. It is God, who is the First Communicator. This communication (between God and humanity) has reached its perfection in the Word made flesh. This new reality create some new challenges for evangelization, new categories of saints and new categories of sins, it creates new heroes and new ways of prayer. One of the most important questions, deeply hidden in the human heart in every continent, also digital, is the request of the Apostles directed to Jesus “teach us to pray” (cf. Lk 11:1).

Digital continent gives tools for building the Kingdom of God, but also devastating weapons

The little devices, which most of us always carry with us are so powerful that they change not only what we do, but also what we think and – perhaps – even who we are. Life tied to digital technology 24 hours a day is not just a habit but essential to the life of many people. E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram... all of these methods of communication have their places in politics, commerce, friendship and even romance. For more and more people the virtual world is no less real than the one outside the virtual world. Why should it not to be used in evangelization? We are called to give a “soul” to the fabric of communications that makes up the “Web”.

Contemporary communication technologies are a gift from God. The origins of them come from the creative energy of communicating God. The history of faith is a history of communication. The Word of God, did not become, however, an e-mail or text message. Through Mary, the Word became flesh close to real, human beings in real time. The Word became a person to be followed, enjoyed and loved! In Jesus, the message and the messenger are united.⁵

On the one hand are we ready to say that our mobile phones or computers are becoming for us a sacred space, or at least a tool to connect with sacred? Of course on the other hand the same devices, which help us to share Good News with friends, may become also a tool for sinful addictions.

For the first time in the history of missions we can communicate across continents so quickly, practically in the same time. From the personal perspective of a given missionary, one of the heaviest burdens for many missionaries – loneliness – now is not such a big problem. Missionaries communicate with their friends and home community by Facebook or WhatsApp. If there are urgent prayer requests or a need for any other immediate actions, such as in a case of Asia Bibi from Pakistan, the information can spread throughout the world within few minutes. Now it is also possible to prepare a daily meditations or other resources for Christian life for the Christians living in the countries where they form minority, sometimes very small. Different applications offer possibility for more private conversations, for those who want to go deeper in their spiritual live.

As missionaries of the past, contemporary digital missionaries have to learn new “digital” languages. As in the “traditional” missions there are also some new problems coming. On this new continent we are more often tempted on hyper-connectivity. This may cause some distraction in normal life of missionaries. The attitude of being always connected can destroy prayer life or a conversation with real people. Being always linked to Skype, YouTube, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Messenger and other can be very temptative. Another

⁵ See T. Rosica, *Global Mission in a Digital Age. Address to US & Canadian Jesuit Formation Conference (June 16, 2015)*, in: <http://saltandlighttv.org/blogfeed/getpost.php?id=64054> (12.11.2018).

new problem coming in this digital continent is the fact that missionaries can be left in difficult situation, when some people – for instance from Africa – find what other Christians – for instance from Europe – are saying or writing. They may be hurt and will not want to listen to the Good News. Already in “Redemptoris missio” John Paul II reminded that now more and more often credibility of a missionary is verified by the attitudes of the sending community, which now can be followed from anywhere in the world.

The digital world is still very new and many Christians are not aware yet about it’s possibilities and dangers. One of these dangers is a temptation of overusing of social media or gaming. According to research done by Barna Group, one of the serious problems is posed by pornography.⁶ Even though the Christian faith helps in struggling with it, nevertheless, about 41 % of practicing Christians (against 72 % of the whole society) have problem with it. As Jaclyn S. Parrish reminds, according to International Mission Board policy “ongoing, unrepentant pornography addiction disqualifies men and women from missionary service.” On the other hand there are some who can give brilliant witness of liberation from this addiction.⁷

Finally, it seems that in this new “digital continent” the main role in evangelization does not have to be played by priest or religious. It could be, but does not have. Better missionary is the one who is able to live better on this new continent in the Christian way.

Examples of Christian Apps

As the example of the “new country” on this “digital continent” still very often is given World Wide Web. There are many books and articles written on different Christian websites, even in the Deep (Dark) Net. For this paper I would like to pick up another “digital country” formed by Christian Apps. Taking into account the size of this text I want to present some data from

⁶ See more: Barna, *Porn in the Digital Age: New Research Reveals 10 Trends*, (Research Releases in Culture & Media • April 6, 2016), <https://www.barna.com/research/porn-in-the-digital-age-new-research-reveals-10-trends/> (12.11.2018).

⁷ This part was elaborated on the basis of books: A. Spadaro, *Cybertheology. Thinking Christianity in the era of the Internet*, New York 2014 and *Digital Religion. Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. by H.A. Campbell, London & New York 2013.

last few days⁸. Although, I am aware that by the time of publication of this article it will not be up to date anyway. On April 29, 2019, with the help of Google search engine I checked 10 main websites / blogs with the highest position asking for “Christian Apps”. Among these top ten were two websites with advertisings / selling information and 8 texts with brief presentation of most popular Christian Apps. Among them there was still one from year 2016, two from 2017, three from 2018 and two from 2019. Even though there are changing quickly it is worthwhile to check some names and basic information about them.

From the year 2016 there is a blog post titled *13 Christian Apps to help your faith* posted November 17, 2016 by the common Author named “KFA – Christian Living”. The address of it was <https://www.fanawards.com/christian-apps-help-faith>. It presented the apps in six groups. The first one was named “Bible Apps”. In this group, the author enumerated two: *YouVersion Bible App* (with rating 4.7/5, for Free), *Olive Tree Bible App* (rated 4.6/5, also for Free). In the group “Memory Apps” which showed Apps helping to memorize Bible the author presented also two: *Fighter Verses* (rated 4.7/5, for \$2.99) and *Bible Memory: Remember Me* (rated 4.6/5, for Free). In the next group about Christian music there was presented just one application called *K-Love – Christian Apps* (rated 4.7/5, for Free). Next group, also with two examples was named “Ministry Apps”. In this group there were presented *In Touch Ministries* (rating: 4.6/5, for Free) and *Living Proof Ministries* (rated also 4.6/5, for Free). The fifth group called “Evangelism Apps” was the biggest, with four examples. The author explained that behind the development of several such apps was movement of Campus Crusade for Christ (called also Cru). The enlisted apps were: *Soularium* (rating 4.8/5, for Free), *God Tools* (rating 4.6/5, for Free), *Jesus Film Project* (rating 4.5/5, for Free) and (a non-Cru app) *Share Your Faith* (rating 4.8/5, for Free). The last group was called “Prayer Apps” and it contained also two examples: *VOM [Voice of Martyrs] Pray Today* (rating 4.8/5, for Free) and *PrayerMate* (rating 4.7/5, for Free).

The main example from 2017 was the address <http://www.recklesslyalive.com/15-must-have-christian-apps/>, in which there was a text called *15 Must-Have Christian Apps to Grow & Inspire Your Faith*, written by Sam Eaton and

⁸ This text was written at the beginning of the 2019. As it is published a year later, some details are already outdated.

posted on June 5, 2017. In this text there was no rating, but the cost was given. This list was not subdivided into other groups but just presented 15 Christian applications. The number one on the list was *YouVersion Bible App* called also by the author: “The Best Bible App”. It was available for Free. Second on the list was *Pray As You Go* called by the author as “Daily Prayer App”. It is also for Free. The third one was: *SermonAudio* called “Worldwide Downloadable Sermon Database”. It is also for Free and as the name suggests it is full of sermons, actually at that time it was over 1.2 million. The following were: *Verses* – Bible Memorization App for Free; *Got Questions* – Answers about Faith, God, Jesus, and the Christian Life, for Free; *Jesus Calling Devotional* – Daily Devotional App, for \$ 9.99; *Spotify* – Music App, for \$ 7.99, for students \$ 4.99; *Daily Audio Bible* – exactly like it sounds, for Free; *Storybook Bible for Kids* – App for Kids, for Free; *You & Me Forever App* – App to Grow in Marriage, for Free; *IHOPKC* – International House of Prayer App, for Free; *Podcasts App* – Millions of Podcasts, for Free; *Audible* – The Best Resource for Audio Books, for Free; *iDisciple* – offering very broad range of books on Adoption & Foster Care, Bible, Career, Children/Teens, Emerging Generation, Evangelism, Leadership, Life Challenges, Marriage, Men, Money, Parenting, Personal Productivity, Prayer, Purpose, Relationships, Spiritual Growth, Women, Worldview. Free for first 3 books; and finally *EveryDollar App* – Dave Ramsey Budgeting App, free for a Very Dollar Plus members.

From the year 2017 the Google search engine in Poland showed also an address: <https://insider.pureflix.com/lifestyle/10-christian-apps-you-cant-live-without>, which is not available in Poland. Only from the brief description one could see that it was about Bible apps, prayer apps and entertainment apps.

The first one from 2018 was written by Mary Dixon and posted on April 28, 2018. It was called “10 Must-Have Christian Apps to Grow & Inspire Your Faith” and published on website: <https://www.askgateway.com/10-must-have-christian-apps-to-grow-inspire-your-faith/>. This list enumerated applications starting with number 1 and finishing with 10. These were: 1. *YouVersion Bible*; 2. *Pray as You Go*; 3. *Pureflix*; 4. *Prayermate*; 5. *Got Questions*; 6. *eChurch Total Engagement Package*; 7. *YouVersion Bible for Kids*; 8. *eHarmony*; 9. *Today’s Christian Music*; 10. *Faith & Mental Wellness*.

Another website from 2018 was posted by Reagan Rose on September 5, 2018. It was entitled “10 Best Christian Apps for iPhone” and published on website <https://www.redeemingproductivity.com/10-best-iphone-apps-christians/>. Here the list started with number 10 and finished with number 1.

This list mentioned such applications as: 10 – *Scripture Typer*, 9 – *Sermon Audio*; 8 – *Overcast*; 7 – *You Need a Budget*; 6 – *Refnet*; 5 – *The Study Bible*; 4 – *Productive Habit Tracker*; 3 – *Grace to you Sermons*; 2 – *Prayer Mate*; and no. 1 – *Bible*. They were not described or evaluated, just listed.

The third result from my google research posted in 2018 was written by Keith Ferrin on October 3, 2018 and was called “8 Free Christian Apps You Should Have On Your Phone”. It was available on the website <https://keithferrin.com/8-free-christian-apps/>. This short presentation contained information on such Apps as: *YouVersion* advertized as the best all-around Bible app; next one was *Logos* presented as the best app for Bible Study; followed by *Read Scripture* – the best app for reading the entire Bible; *iDisciple* – the best app for devotions, sermons, videos, and music...all in one place; *ChristianAudio* – the best app for Christian audiobooks; *Scripture Typer* – the best “memorization” app; *Bible Lens* – a fun app for connecting the Bible and YOUR pictures...and then sharing them; *Dwell* – the best app for listening to the Bible... if you like a stylized experience and the English Standard Version.

Among results published in 2019 we have a website with no precise information on the date of when it was posted. It is on https://en.softonic.com/solutions/what-are-the-best-christian-apps?ex=at-1742-C&utm_expid=.03MT-8JmvSQ2hkR8KNTAqhA.2&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F. It was posted by Anonymous Author and called “What are the best Christian apps?”. This is a result of the votes for the best 8 Christian Apps. There is no information who were the voters, but there is information how many votes every App received. There is also an information, that all of them are Free. These were: 1. *Faithlife News* (13 votes); 2. *Proverbs* (10); 3. *A Lamp Unto* (10); 4. *And Bible* (9); 5. *Joyful Living with Bible* (8); 6. *PrayerMate* (7); 7. *OurPrayer* (6); and 8. *Bible Memory: Remember Me* (4 votes).

The last one, published already in 2019, shown in my brief Google research was written by an author called: The Praying Woman and entitled “15 Best Christian Apps of 2019.” It is available on <https://theprayingwoman.com/15-best-christian-apps/>. These best Christian Applications for the year 2019, according to the author are: 1. *PureFlix.com*; 2. *Not Just Words*; 3. *Scripture Typer Bible Memory*; 4. *Our Daily Bread*; 5. *Daily Devotion*; 6. *She Reads Truth*; 7. *Echo*; 8. *Prayer Notebook*; 9. *PrayerMate*; 10. *Crosspaths*; 11. *Christian Mingle*; 12. *Collide*; 13. *Olive Tree Bible+*; 14. *Bible Gateway App*; 15. *Bible (YouVersion)*.

Four Case Studies from Poland

For the purpose of this presentation I have chosen four apps, which seem to be popular among Catholics in Poland and I have been using them. These are: Pismo swiete, Modlitwa w drodze, Evangelizo – Ewangelia na dziś and Magnificat.PL.

- 1) “Pismo święte” (Holy Scripture) is a non-official application based on the website www.pismo.swiete.pl and Facebook profile www.facebook.com/pismoswietepl. It offers possibility to download the texts of liturgical prayers (as well as songs and commentaries – in the paid “Premium” version) to iPhones, or other Kindle readers. It offers possibility of liturgical prayer for those who want to pray it while not at home. The liturgical texts of the liturgy of hours are published for non-commercial use with agreement of the Conference of the Polish Bishops.
- 2) “Modlitwa w drodze” (Prayer on the way) is a Polish Jesuit Application – as the name says – for the people “on the way”. It can help with prayer almost everywhere, at home, on the way to work or school. Every day it offers the new inspiration for prayer based on given day Gospel. The best advantage of it is the fact that it can be heard. It may be used without necessity of looking at it. During Lent time it offers also the possibility of the meditations on the Way of the Cross as well as “a Lenten corner for kids”, “Extreme Way of the Cross”, Chaplet to Divine Mercy. What is quite interesting there is also a possibility of Rosary to be recited or even sung together. At the end there is also proposal of examination of conscience and Archives.
- 3) “Evangelizo – Ewangelia na codzień” (Gospel for today) is a Polish version of the service offered in 16 languages, also in French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, German, Arabic, Italian, Armenian, Chinese, Gaelic, Greek, Malagasy, Korean and Russian. It offers the texts of readings for given day, a commentary to the Gospel taken usually from saints of the early Fathers of the Church, short information about saints commemorated given day (some of them are not well known), proposition of prayers in different intensions.
- 4) “Magnificat.PL” is also a Polish version of the Application available in few languages. However, the Polish version is not just a copy of original French or English. It offers some proposals of morning and evening

prayer, as well as prayer before going sleep. It proposes also a meditation of the day, which is not always related to the Mass readings of given day. It offers also some information on some saints, not necessary from the day. For every month it offers some texts for reflection or catechesis.

For a deeper methodological analysis of Christian apps one may use the article of H.A. Campbell, B. Altenhofen, W. Bellar & K.J. Cho, *There's a religious app for that! A framework for studying religious mobile applications.*⁹ They proposed 11 categories of Religious Applications: Prayer, Focus/Meditation, Ritual, Sacred Textual Engagement, Devotional Worship, Religious Utilities, Religious Social Media, Religious Games, Religious Wisdom and Leaders, Religious Media Outlets, and Religious Apps for Kids. Systematizing them they created two parent classifications, 1) oriented around religious practice, 2) embedded with religious content. These were: 1) Apps oriented around religious practice: Sacred Textual Engagement, Prayer, Focus/Meditation, Devotional Worship, Ritual. 2) Apps embedded with religious content: Religious Utilities, Religious Wisdom and Leaders, Religious Media, Religious Games, Religious Apps for Kids, and Religious Social Media.¹⁰

The Religious apps mentioned above in the brief overview may also be divided into two groups. There are some concentrated on Bible or research in spirituality and prayer but also some more precisely “missionary” trying to reach with Good News those who are not Christians yet. The other group is directed to those who are more generally interested in some cultural values of Christian faith.

⁹ “Mobile Media & Communication” 2 (2014) no. 2, p. 154-172.

¹⁰ In another classification of religious apps they proposes such categories as: Lifestyle (in it apps with daily meditations and scriptures), Reference (in it apps with information on holy books, religious writings and other religious information; often digital versions of sacred texts), Education (apps with guidance and instruction on religion). These categories are to be found also in these fours Polish Apps. There were also others, who did not show up in these fours, such as Utilities (such as inspirational pictures), Entertainment (such children's television or religious quotes), Games (religious games), Music (musical libraries – there is music in background in “Modlitwa w drodze”).

Concluding suggestion for “digital missiology”

As much as the missionaries of the past had to learn the languages and customs of the new continents, so we have to do today. On this new continent also our “religiosity” is changing somehow. We do not know yet how.

People are using today their smartphones, iPads, iPhones, or other tools as part of their daily lives. So we might use them as well for strengthening our faith or send a message to a friend that we just finished praying for him or her. Changes are going quickly. Some of these Apps might be soon forgotten, but it seems that the tendency will continue.

Pope Francis likes to speak of the church as a “field hospital after a battle”. From this image of a church as a “field hospital” we can derive a new understanding of the church’s mission in different “countries” on the digital continent. Going there does not require passport nor travel ticket to enter. One just needs a keyboard, a screen or a hand-held device. In different “countries” of this continent there are many wars each day with many wounded people, who live there, work or troll. It is an immense battleground that needs many field hospitals set up to bind wounds and reconcile warring parties.

Some people say “You are what you eat”. To conclude my presentation let me repeat after one of the authors: “You are what you install”. Which religious applications do I have in my phone?

P.S. The whole idea of this article takes on a new meaning in a new social situation, forced isolation, caused for coronavirus. Until now, the media mission was to cover a long distance, which in effect was to shorten the time of arrival of the news. In a situation of isolation, this distance is sometimes much shorter, but the sense of communication itself changes. Internet / Internet evangelization at the time of restrictions on public gatherings has a completely new purpose. All kinds of online mass transmissions, online retreats, spiritual advice over the phone, etc., are not so much about reaching someone as sustaining a spiritual hunger that is impossible through physical contact with people.

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