

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE CHURCH

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INTERNET: www.fespinal.com - Translated by Gerarda Walsh - Cover illustration: Roger Torres - CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA Edition - R. de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona - tel: 93 317 23 38 - fax: 93 317 10 94 - info@fespinal.com - Printed by: Edicions Rondas, S.L. - ISSN: 0214-6509 - Legal deposit (Spanish version): B-7490-07 - ISBN: 84-9730-189-7 - Legal deposit (Spanish version): B-16388-2008.April 2008.

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INTRODUCCIÓN: WORRYING TRENDS

For years now, our society is becoming increasingly conscious of a deep crisis in the Catholic Church. For some, this represents a confirmation of the end of Christianity. For others it represents something that could be described as a regression, or a “winter-time” of the Church (K. Rahner), a return to the bastions¹, a State coup by the so-called “Theocons” or using the more traditional Teresian expression: “hard times”.

The most visible sign of this crisis can be found not in the internal conflicts and discontent of the Church, but rather in the countless tacit defections of those originally baptised into the Church. On writing these lines, we came across the statistic (that we are unable to confirm) that “the departure of Catholics from their Church (is) at an annual rate of 1%”². To this must be added the fact that many “prodigal” sons, lost following a period of drifting away or distancing themselves from the Church, yearn for some type of spiritual nourishment and go in search of it, and yet at the outset, they dismiss the Catholic Church from the places they search. According to a recent study in public opinion, the Church is one of the least valued institutions in our country: at 4.4%, below Parliament and below that of business-

men (which was over 5%)³. In 1984, the same poll showed the Church had reached 5%, thus reflecting its deterioration since.

The aim of this booklet

These are the facts: there is no point in ignoring them or denying them in the way an ostrich would bury its head in the sand. On tackling this issue, we are not claiming that we would be able to do better (certainly not). All we want is for all members of our *institution to have the humility to wonder if perhaps we are in some way at fault*, instead of believing that these surveys are only in response to people’s personal motives for persecuting the Church. In fact, the Christian community today has members of great generosity and many are of a better Christian quality than the sociological Catholics from the time of the dictatorship. Such admirable Christians deserve a better institution. And this would almost merit giving a greater voice to all the different Christian strands that exist within the Church today, instead of trying to impose one single school of thought as being the only real “Catholic” one, and disallowing all others.

On carrying out this study, we are by no means lending support to the awful image of the Church that is usually portrayed by the media who, in general, only mention the Church in order to comment on some scandal or other (preferably of a sexual nature, a financial nature, or on the subject of internal conflicts, whether they be real or perceived). This unfortunate image is only a fabrication by the press, of less substance than the column inches it occupies. And yet this will continue to occur due to the classic rule that applies in journalism, that only the more scandalous or outlandish topics make news; while other topics make news for the more serious reason that –however much they deny it– *the media is in reality, at the service of money, and not of the truth*. But this detail is of little significance here now.

On the other hand, what is more problematic is the way the Church reacts in the face of the criticism it receives: it displays a reaction that is always defensive, believing itself to have been unjustly attacked or persecuted, without stopping for one minute to wonder if it has perhaps done something wrong or indeed given some ammunition to these inflamed critics. Even the press, broadcasting stations, or communication networks owned by the Church seem to speak solely and exclusively along the lines of “*pro domo sua*”, (if we may use the classical expression of Cicero), rather than conveying information objectively. This inability to peacefully accept criticism and go on to examine itself before the Lord, seems to us to be the greatest evidence of this crisis. And it means that when the crisis is acknowl-

edged, it will only be in the context of placing all the blame for it on the evil of the outside world, while silently grieving for the ancient world of ecclesiastical power and Christianity.

First observation

Throughout this booklet, although we will be attempting to analyse this crisis, it would be fitting to say that the best way to define it is *the control of the whole ecclesiastical arena by one single school of thought, (that being the most extremely conservative), in regards to understanding Christianity, with the express desire of excluding, expelling and denying from this arena all other Christian paths, which are labelled as examples of radical unorthodoxy. This claim of being absolute, seen also in extremist groups, attempts to impose its own truth, thus going against the notion of charity, and against what is expressly taught in the New Testament (Eph 4:15), and its portrayal of the great plurality that existed within the Early Church⁴. This attitude is also the source of great distress for many other members of the Church.*

In our opinion, this unilateralist stance plays a crucial role for the following reason: more than fifty years ago, a famous book was published called “*France, mission country*”. It was a sociologically astute pronouncement on the process of de-Christianisation that was occurring in our neighbouring country. However, instead of welcoming it as such and examining what had brought it about, it was completely discredited, without paying any attention

to it at all, and instead found itself accused of being an attack on the Church. And yet now we see that this process of de-Christianisation has spread, to such an extent that today that we need to talk about Spain as a mission country, as well as Europe as a whole, etc. But still there are too many voices that prefer to ignore reality, and who would rather wall themselves in with some minority group (that is only too delighted to receive them), a practice that is a far cry from the Church's early history. Instead of asking if current trends are perhaps linked to something that we as a Church have done wrong, they limit themselves to blaming others, rather than looking inwards, which is what we now need to do.

The way

Therefore: in a de-Christianised continent like Europe, the first mission of the Church should (supposedly) be to become a spiritual Master, or “mystagogue”: *someone who introduces others to the experience of God*. The Church as a “mother” should take on the task of so many mothers who would little by little introduce their children to the experience of trust, adoration and acceptance in the face of the great Mystery that surrounds us, that which we call God. This Mystery is the Lord of the Church who is described as *Abba* (Father) and who has played an active role throughout history, in a journey of liberation from all that which is inhuman towards that which Jesus called the Kingdom of God, and which ultimately signifies the dethroning of all powers that threaten the humanity of mankind.

However, our Church shows itself to be too incapable of setting the scene for that which Rahner would define as being imperative for the 21st century: that Christians should be people with spiritual experience, because if not, they will no longer be Christians, which is exactly what is happening today. Instead of setting about awakening this experience of believers, the ecclesiastical institution prefers to protect itself by seeking extrinsic power and authority, and then feeling persecuted when society will not concede it to them. The “towers” of this fortress could be represented in the five sections that we will be looking at in this booklet, described as the “wounds” of the Church.

Overview

Firstly, and although we will be looking at the crisis in this booklet through the behaviour and the image of ecclesiastical authority portrayed by the Church (namely the Roman Curia), it is clear that the ecclesiastical authorities would not be able to function if they did not find a solid base in several Christian groups or schools of thought. In listing some of these, we will try to give an overview of the sociological nature of the Church in the 21st century, at least, in regards to Europe.

1. Movements, groups and communities of excellent intentions exist, who live quite reclusively and on the sidelines of historical progress. Although they often look at the Holy Spirit as being at the root of their existence, they display a *profound contradiction between the universality of the Spirit and*

their own “ghetto” spirit. When they are asked, in the name of the Gospel, to open their eyes to the outside world, they answer, “we are not a non-governmental organisation” (literal quotation).

2. Movements exist displaying a fundamentalism that is becoming increasingly difficult to hide, claiming to be able to save the Church through power and money. In these can be found a *conflict between the Spirit and the materialism of everything that is institutional*: in such a way that the breath of the Spirit only seems to be needed in order to strengthen the institution, instead of putting that institution at the service of the liberty and universality of God. If the previous group could be considered as a ghetto, this group would be considered as a sect.

3. There are groups and communities that, in the face of the ecclesiastical crisis, have bravely decided not to be ashamed to call themselves Christians, convinced of the great enriching power that Christianity holds and can bring. But this valiant attitude seems to *confuse not being ashamed of the faith with not having to repent for anything.* The idea of reform being necessary in the Church is seen by them as a lack of love for one’s mother Church. For this reason they usually retreat to a more conservative stance, rather than state what they would actually like to see happen.

4. In addition to these, there are numerous “sociological” Christians who are this way mainly through passivity rather than through genuine choice and faithful conviction. They limit themselves to a more external type of fulfil-

ment in difficult or testing times of conflict for example, and seek instead to *sort out the difficulty rather than feel called to acts of Christian generosity themselves.*

5. Parallel to these, although possessing greater sincerity, there are several Christians “*in crisis*”, who usually say that they don’t know whether they are believers or not, and who are sometimes motivated by their emotional feelings. Above all, they sense the huge difficulty in being believers alone in the midst of a hostile or distant society. And for those who were originally instructed in the “suit of faith”, it has instead become something more like their “First Communion” suit: they find themselves not able to fit into it anymore, but do not have any other religious garment to wear.

6. There are also many heterogeneous groups of Christians that are deeply unhappy with the institution of the Church. It could be said –however scandalous it may seem– that it is perhaps among these groups that the best grains of Christian quality can be found. In some cases their faith survives because, as a result of Vatican II, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ was formed, which directs and nourishes their lives, and which keeps them standing in spite of the solitude in which they live out their faith. In other cases, this discontentment has led to an uncritical acceptance of all values and non-values that come with social Modernity, as if that could provide them with the real revealed truth. This latter group do not find it hard at all to dismiss an official truth of the Church rather than dismiss

a so-called official truth of Modernity occurring in the society that surrounds them –which is obviously not good at all. These groups sometimes collaborate with other groups by supporting each other, and in some ways represent the true witnesses of Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Among them have been eminent figures, such as teachers of theology, as well as instructors in the Christian faith (and this has often led to some becoming well-known or lesser-known martyrs, who have had to live out their faith in painful solitude, deserted by their institution).

This overview is undoubtedly too brief. And furthermore, specific individuals do not always replicate the exact behaviour of one particular group but instead display *intertwined characteristics belonging to different groups*. However, as a more general overview, it can help to underline the crisis that we are going to try to describe in this booklet.

Wisdom, conflict and temptation: two Biblical examples

We will close this introduction by pointing out that this crisis is not characterised by conflicts. *Conflicts are inevitably part of the ecclesiastical institution*, as they will always be part of human existence. Furthermore, unity or ecclesiastical communion should not be all about uniformity and the absence of conflicts, but instead should be about the love that has built bridges of respect and friendship across these conflicts.

From its beginnings, the history of the Church speaks of a community of

Judeo-Christians settled in Jerusalem around James, known as the brother of the Lord, who worked hard to convert Jews and faced numerous other difficulties in the form of different and more open ways of interpreting Christianity (that of Peter of Antioch, or the more radical view of Paul). And yet it was these people more so than James that managed to ensure the survival of the churches, by adapting the Church to popular culture and thus passing on the Christian message. This pattern can be seen occurring a thousand times, throughout the entire history of the Church. For now this quick summary must suffice. In such a context as this, the Church should show the wisdom of Gamaliel when faced with the opposition of the Jewish authorities who wanted to put an end to this developing Christianity: he recommended them to leave its fate to history, (or from a believer's perspective, to God that is present throughout history), which so often allows the more baseless beliefs to die off naturally, but nurtures the more fertile faiths, however much they are persecuted (cf. Acts 5:34 ff.).

Secondly, the Church should realise that the call of God leads to a path of temptation since it initially seems to lead us through the difficulties of the desert. Furthermore, the Church can also fall into the temptation of Massah and Meribah, who as God's chosen people upset Him through their lack of faith when, following their departure from Egypt, they did not find the Promised Land, but instead found a path beset with difficulties (cf. Ex 17: 1-7; Deut. 6:16; Psalm 95:8).

Limiting ourselves to the example of Spain, to any outside observer it would be quite obvious that the current crisis facing Catholicism in Spain and the hostility it incites when anything remotely to do with Christianity is brought up, is not the work of an evil government born into a liberal generation, but instead the harvest of the sins of our hierarchy before and during the time of the dictatorship. And given the degenerative nature of all things human, the reaction of these people has not always been exemplary.

We believe that these two examples explain the perspective from which we

are writing this work, and whose structure will be the following: in 1832 C. Rosmini published *The Five Wounds of the Holy Church*⁵, which soon afterwards was placed on the list of prohibited books by Pope Pius IX.

However, in one of those paradoxes that often occur throughout the history of the Church, the author of that same work is now going to be beatified.

So following this model, we would like to talk about what would seem to us to be the “five wounds” of the Church today.

This will be our next chapter.

We cannot say with great conviction that we have chosen to work for the poor. Firstly, because we ourselves do not participate in the poverty that they experience. And secondly because we do not work against the wealth of iniquity with the same freedom and strength that was used by our Lord. Choosing the poor, which should never mean excluding the rich..., does however mean excluding the way of life of rich people, which is an insult to the misery of the poor, because of its tendency to accumulate wealth and privilege which inevitably deprives and marginalises the vast majority of human families.

Letter from Pere Casaldàliga to Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of his visit to Rome
El País (23-VI-1988), p. 32.

1. THE “FIVE WOUNDS” OF THE CHURCH TODAY

1. FIRST WOUND: FORGETTING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POOR

The current situation in our world, with regard to the numerous poor and starving people and the select few that have outlandish fortunes, far from being a natural accident, is a situation that goes radically against the will of God, as the teaching of the Church acknowledges.

“Today we see men trying to secure a sure food supply, cures for diseases, and steady employment. We see them trying to eliminate every ill, to remove every obstacle which offends man’s dignity... And yet, at the same time, a large number of them live amid conditions which frustrate these legitimate desires... Today it is most important for people to understand and appreciate that the social question ties all men together, in every part of the world.” (Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, 6 and 3).

Nearly three thousand million people have seen this basic right denied from them in an extreme way, while hundreds of thousands of people have seen their wealth and economic power increase to unimaginable levels. Therefore, when faced with what is perhaps the most dramatic crisis of humanity today –both quantitatively and qualitatively– and in spite of what Pope Paul VI said, it does not seem that the Church can say that they have fulfilled the directive of Vatican II: “Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts” (GS 1).

This realisation is even more difficult to accept, because as Pope John Paul II stated in relation to the cause of the poor the Church... considers it her mission, her service, a *proof of her fidelity to Christ*” (*Laborem Exercens*, no. 8).

Needless to say, this proclamation is much in keeping with Christian revelation, according to which, God listens to the cry of the poor and to all victims of oppression (James 5:5), and He answers their call, counting the poor, hungry, suffering and persecuted peoples among His most cherished (Lk 6:20-26). The Gospel considers them to be the “guardians” of God’s plan through history, a plan that the Bible called the “Kingdom of God”, (an expression which does not signify a domineering reign of power, but rather the *freedom granted to all people from other powers or forms of slavery that hinders the true freedom of mankind*).

For this reason, God is considered as a “God of the poor”: the foundation of Christian identity is expressed in this way: “He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away”, and He has done this “in remembrance of His mercy” (Lk 1: 52,54). This is precisely why the Gospels teach us that the judgement of God over our world is not so much a question of whether we gave God’s envoys a platform from which to speak, or whether we have sat them at our table (Lk 13:26), but instead whether we gave them something to eat when they were hungry, or clothed them when they were naked or visited them when they were in prison, including those people whose behaviour could not be considered as Christian (Mt 25:31ff). It can be seen then that Pope John Paul II viewed our loyalty to those who were made victims throughout history as being the real

decisive factor for the faithfulness of the Church to Jesus Christ (L.E. 8).

However, if we apply these criteria to the modern institution of the Church, we would sadly have to conclude that this Church, which represents the God of the Bible, is not in any way a “Church of the poor” (Pope John XXIII). We as a Church offer the poor a form of fatherly benevolence, but we have not yet managed to manifest this radical love towards them that would translate as a sacrament of God’s love. Instead it seems as though we behave towards these victims just like the rest of the world does: we treat them lukewarmly and merely to satisfy our own conscience, in the hope that those excluded from society won’t bother us too much. In the light of this, we are reminded of the belief of St. Vincent de Paul: that no one can love God without first unconditionally loving those He loves dearly...

If we may put it bluntly, we seem to represent much more a Church of the rich than a Church of the poor. Yet the harsh words of warning of the New Testament are rarely heard coming from the mouths of Church leaders: “is it not they (the rich) who blaspheme the honourable name [of Christians] which was invoked over you?” (James 2:7). Instead it seems as though the ecclesiastical institution is waiting for its salvation from rich people, and not from the Lord.

More serious evidence of what we have discussed can be seen in the painful contrast of what has recently been witnessed on several occasions: on the one hand, in the community of the Church, there is an abundance of peo-

ple, groups and institutions who have made a clear choice to work for the poor and for all victims throughout history. On the other hand, these people often meet with numerous difficulties from the very leaders of the Church community, whether it is in the form of rejection or persecution.

It cannot be denied that, in this type of radical work for the poor, they will come across inequalities, imperfections and even unchristian behaviour. And even more so when (as is quite common), that work is carried out in conditions that can only be described as heroic solitude. But given this fact, it does then seem scandalous that the Church does not know how to behave in this situation by following the Gospel's advice of: "he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick" (Mt 12:20), and instead reacting by silencing or totally discrediting these people.

For this reason, there are many crude arguments flying about, both in the vein of "liturgical dignity" as well as arguments based on reductionism or materialism, as if there should be a real form of "spiritual worship" that excludes those marginalized and forgotten victims of the world. Instead, the only thing that the Church can offer in the form of worship to its God is the surrender of the Supreme Victim, which ironically summarised the injustice inherent in our entire history. And as if we had forgotten that Christian truth, which we will rephrase here by parodying N. Berdiaeff: bread for myself is a pagan or egotistical question ("material"), but bread for my neighbour is a religious and christological question ("spiritual").

All of this has quite paradigmatically worsened at the present time, as God seems to have called the Church to make a radical change of direction on this point. In times past, poverty was often the result of historical insufficiencies.

But these days, following the display of economic growth that has taken place over the last two centuries, the very existence of poverty represents an unprecedented scandal that is also the source of continued tendencies towards violence. *The Church has still not acknowledged these signs of the times, which should represent that ancient call to justice (from the Old Testament) that was so often used when speaking of God.*

In modern theology there is a lot of discussion about the "hermeneutic privilege of the poor"; but we have yet to see the appearance of one single official document that brings this privilege into play, so as to bring scriptural teachings to life.

None of the above has been written with the aim of throwing around accusations, but has instead been written as a form of confession: we accept that we too are far from what the Gospels ask of us. And as Jesuits, we feel we have a greater guilt on this issue if we face up to the teachings of our own Order. But going beyond this perceived blindness and deafness to reality, the most important thing is that the Church is losing credibility, and its outward appearance lacks the evangelical transparency and internal authority (*eksousía*)⁶ that should direct people's attention to the words and actions of our Lord.

2. THE SECOND WOUND: THE FOCUS ON HIERARCHY

We could describe this wound vividly by saying that it undid the reversal of the order of Chapters 2 and 3 in the Constitution of Vatican II about the Church, which according to commentators, was of huge significance.

The revolution of Vatican II

In fact: the text that the Roman Curia had prepared for the Constitution on the Church firstly began speaking about its hierarchy, after devoting the previous chapter to the Church as a mystery. In this way *it seemed that the essence of the mystery of the Church was in its “sacred power”*. But the ecclesiastical committee rejected this order of chapters by an overwhelming majority of votes, and instead began by speaking about the *people of God*. This is the true mystery of the Church: the communion of all people, which also serves to fulfil the definition of the Church as being a symbol or “sacrament of salvation” (cf. LG 1 and 2). Only once the people of God have been established, can various services (or ministries) begin to flourish from them, which all people need: among these being authority, which is both indispensable and desired by God.

It thus avoided the heretical notion that only the Church holds power while the rest of the faithful are nothing more than a training ground on which this power can be exercised. Which, in the already famous expression of Y. Congar, would have made ecclesiology

become something more like “hierarchy”: as in, discussing the Church would be the equivalent of discussing hierarchy. Vatican II forbid this way of understanding the Church, clearly stating that “the Church has not been *really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men*, unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy” (Ad Gentes 21, with our own italics).

The Church no longer defined itself as a “perfect society”, instead defining itself as a “communion”. This communion, that Vatican II would see as being “similar to the Trinity”, should above all be of a horizontal nature; and when it is vertical, it should be a two-way movement: as much moving in an upwards direction from the world as it moves in a downward direction from God. Several authorities of the Church repeatedly launch calls for a communion (understood only in the sense of submission); but one does wonder if they are sometimes quite concerned at the thought of establishing a real communion with their brethren.

Ecclesiastical authority would then have free rein for this evangelical reversal of authority that would mean working at the service of others (Lk 22,24-27), something which we see so little of in the Church today, in the same way as we see very little of this occurring with worldly powers. The quality of the people is fundamental to this

communion that defines the Church: a people of equality, where the presence of authority can really make the words of Saint Augustine ring true: “*I am a believer with you*”.

However, in response to this we soon hear voices of authority that try to discredit the definition of the Church given by Vatican II as a people of God, criticising this as “sociological reductionism”. This accusation, aiming to get rid of the horizontal notion of “communion” by giving it an exclusively vertical significance, is in line with what Pope Pius X wrote in *Vehementer Nos*: the Church is a society made up of unequal roles, the priests and the congregation. For those more versed in theology we could also add that, in this way, *the Biblical depiction of God’s work, became substituted by the more Platonic understanding of Pseudo-Dionysius*.

This is why it is necessary to explain that this accusation against the definition of the Church as being the “people of God” is not only completely without foundation, but also a blatant profanation. We should remember that the New Testament talks about a “holy people” and that this is why this holiness should be reflected not just in every individual member of the Church, but also in their joint identity as a people. The Church could not be the Body of Christ or the Temple of the Holy Spirit if it did not really and truly represent the people of God the Father: a priestly people and for that reason, a “holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9).

The fact that this definition can be misinterpreted is also something that

threatens other interpretations of the Church and, for this reason, it should not be misused.

The reality

The consequences of these two interpretations become clear in some harsh words spoken by Cardinal Congar, the great ecclesiologist of the twentieth century, whom Pope John Paul II described as “a gift from God to His Church”. We prefer to use his words (translated) rather than our own here. Congar said:

Rome has practically eliminated the very reality of the *ecclesia* and thus reduced it to a group that is dependent on it. The Roman Curia is everything”... “Rome is not really influenced by anything other than its own existence and its own authority, and is undoubtedly of the belief that it can serve God in this way. Yet, how little it talks of God! And how little it talks about *the people* from believer to believer and from one servant of Jesus Christ to another”... “It seeks nothing more than the affirmation of its own authority”.

This near elimination of the “ecclesia” (which in Greek and in the Hebrew word used to translate it, means the “assembly of a people”) has, for Congar, a series of unfortunate consequences in regards to the mission and the credibility of the Church. For example:

– “This Rome that has reduced everything to ceremonies”.

– “Rome is only interested in its authority, not in the Gospel”⁸.

– ...The ecclesiology of the Curia, is so dominated by the sacred nature of the figure of the Pope, that they have become one and the same. It has also been affected by the anthropology that exists here, where no trust or sympathy is given to the strengths of mankind”⁹.

– “The Curia does not understand anything;... its members are kept in an ignorance of reality, and of *political* subjection to a simplistic and false ecclesiology in which everything is inferred from the Pope; they see the Church as being no more than an enormous centralist administration of which they occupy the centre”¹⁰.

We could even add another consequence here which we believe arises quite often: and that is careerism, the obsessive search for honours and promotions (that are essentially mundane at heart, however well-dressed up they may be), that is moulding the behaviour of many ministers of the Church, who are more concerned with their own promotion and security than with their role of shepherding the people of God. This is why it is not surprising that Congar reached a very serious conclusion on everything he had spoken about:

This costly and slow-moving machine, so prestigious and self-infatuated, a prisoner of its own myth of greatness, all this is *the non-Christian part of the Roman Church*... it conditions (or rather impedes) its openness to a task that is completely evangelical and prophetic...¹¹.

We would not dare to speak like this ourselves. But we will however add a few notes. Pope John XXIII had noticed something similar to this happening when he admitted to the French ambassador during his presentation at the Quirinal: “*I want to shake off all the imperial dust that has clung to the throne of Peter since the time of Constantine*”¹².

And secondly: that which had only ever been spoken of by a few prophets, can now be seen occurring in several parts of the world, and it is what makes the image of the Church appear scandalous to so many people. This is why Congar spoke with such happiness about the changes brought about by Vatican II:

Conciliar theology has applied itself to life: the theology of communion is essential and therefore the theology of power will have to adapt itself to this¹³.

Unfortunately we believe that the opposite has happened: the communion has instead adapted itself to possessing power.

A confirmation

The last surprising confirmation of what we have said is provided by the following anecdote recounted by Hilar Ragner in the newspaper *El País*: during a visit to Montserrat by a well-known Cardinal from the Curia, on August 15th 1981, she heard, in a conversation with the Benedictine community, some hope expressed pertaining to the reform of the Curia, and some criticism or doubt over the amount of jour-

neys taken by Pope John Paul II (expressed by the theologian Evangelista Vilanova). The Cardinal emphatically countered their hopes with the reply: “it is the Pope’s prerogative to travel, just as it is the Curia’s prerogative to govern the Church”.

The criticism of such journeys is debatable. However, the statement that the prerogative of the Curia is to govern is both false and ecclesiastically unsound. The authority of the Church does not lie with the Roman Curia, but instead with the Holy See and its head. The Curia is nothing more than the necessary administrative body *at the service of the Church’s authority but not a substitution for it*. Yet it seems undeniable to us today that the Curia operates less like the secondary body, and more like the primary authority. And instead of working at the service of the Pope, there are many different levels existing between the Holy See and its head. This is why it was criticised during the last Council. But then its reform failed after Vatican II and failed again under Pope Paul VI, in order to finally reach this understanding that the organisational structure of the Vatican is not operating as it should.

A key element of this erroneous behaviour is the fact that the members of the Curia are ordained Bishops. This contradicts what was ordered by the Council of Calcedonia (451) in relation to the practice of so-called “absolute ordinations”, in other words: when a Bishop is ordained without any church over which to preside or serve. This infringement is supposedly avoided through the verbal subtlety of calling them Bishops “in par-

tibus” or: Bishops of churches that no longer exist. But it is difficult to accept that such a loophole can satisfy the consciences of those who, as followers of the Lord were rebuked in the Gospel for “transgress(ing) the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition” (Mt 15:3).

As difficult as it was to say this, we are not the only ones who think this way. Archbishop Quinn, who was a member of the Curia and President of the North American Episcopal conference, wrote, and we paraphrase:

“The Curia has made many decisions that go against collegiality. Time and again, decisions made by Episcopal conferences were withdrawn. Translations of the Catechism and the Lectionary that were approved by Episcopal conferences in various countries, were rejected by the Curia... In the appointment of Bishops, it is not unusual that there are some who were never put forward as candidates by Bishops of that area and that are in fact unknown to them” (p. 226). And: “the episcopacy should not merely be a secondary organ that has to be instructed and trained by the Curia so that it adopts a certain point of view, particularly in matters that are open to the free opinion of the Church”. Therefore, it cannot be assumed at all that “the Curia has the function of indoctrinating the Episcopacy on matters that are not related to faith”...¹⁴.

This is how things work. However, we are not trying to impose our opinion on anyone here, but instead standing up for a position that should be completely sustainable and orthodox in today’s

Church. This is why our stance should not be disallowed or excluded from the communion that is the Church, or accused of being heretical or showing a lack of love for that same Church. These repudiations are too easy, particularly when Vatican II asked that the Roman Curia and its congregations “be re-organised and better adapted to the needs of the times, regions” (Ch. D. 9). And we should look at those words alongside those of Pope Paul VI, who was addressing the Roman Curia when he said:

“We accept with humility and critical reflection, and we take on board what has been so fairly pointed out. Rome does not need to put herself on the defensive, deaf to suggestions which come from upright sources, and all the less when these are voices of friends and brothers”¹⁵.

Patriarchal focus on hierarchy

The last fault of this focus on the sacredness of the Curia is the distinct lack of attention given to women, whom the ecclesiastical institution seems to ignore, unless to admonish them or blame them for something. Pope John XXIII declared in *Pacem in Terris* that raising the status of women was a “sign of the times”. The Papal Curia seems unable to recognise these signs of the times through which God is communicating with us; and some of the documents on this subject would deserve the evangelical reproach of “breaking the word of God by relying on traditions of the elders”. To give one example, how could someone write that “in accordance with

the ancient tradition of the Church, institution to the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men”¹⁶. What a contrast that is with the Early Church of Rome where a woman named Junias, is described by Paul as an “apostle”! (Romans 16:7).

We are not going to discuss here (or give an approved list) of each and every one of the steps, issues and grievances that the Church should address. But we do ask that the ecclesiastical authorities understand the directive that is radically expressed in the letter to the Galatians (3:28): “in Christ Jesus... there is neither male nor female”. Early Christianity scandalised society by its attitude of openness towards women; today’s official Catholicism scandalises society by its narrow-mindedness towards women. This is why we ask for a little faith in God, who guides history in spite of everything, just as we ask for a greater welcome and increased trust in women, which is how they were treated by Jesus, even though this was seen as scandalous by the society of his day. Changes need to be made, even if it is only out of gratitude towards those women who are largely responsible for the survival of the Church, and also because this dominant form of patriarchy is extremely damaging to the Church.

In conclusion

It is only the Roman Curia, in its current form, that requires this hierarchy-centred ecclesiology. The Holy See, and its Head, does not need it at all. And neither do the people of God.

In this context, defending St. Peter's ministry today means ensuring a worthy successor to Peter, not a Caiphas or Constantine or Charlemagne. Let the "fisherman's sandals" once more replace the crown of the priestly king. And let the Roman Curia be at the service of the Pope rather than representing some kind of "court" enjoying the halo of authority to its own advantage, a situation that is similar to what happens with all absolute monarchies. And neither is the important ministry of St. Peter similar to that of some kind of constitutional king, who doesn't actually govern, and whose role is simply symbolic or for show, or someone who is told what he must say (this is how the Curia seem to understand it).

And as for what makes up the people of God, Pope Paul VI underlined his hope for equality and participation as being the two virtues of our time in which is reflected the true dignity of mankind¹⁷. And yet: this dual hope does not have anywhere to go in the cu-

rent structure of the Church, and this represents a major obstacle.

The specific steps that this requires have been expressed many times: that the Pope not be Head of State, and that his church representatives in each country do not enjoy the political status of ambassadors; the suppression of the Cardinalate as an office and a reform of the Papal election (along the lines of the plan that the Curia rejected in relation to Pope Paul VI); participation of local churches in the election of their ministers; giving deliberative functions to the Synod of Bishops by way of collegiality, rather than just consultative ones; a far-reaching revision of the proceedings of the congregation of the faith; and a serious and detailed look at the role of women in the Church, which we should sometimes be ashamed of...¹⁸.

These reforms are not "solutions" in themselves, but we believe that they would revive the health and credibility of the Church.

For many of us, certain structures of the Curia do not respond to the testimony of evangelical simplicity and fraternal communion that both the Lord and the world require of us; nor do they communicate by their behaviour, which is sometimes centralist and imposing, a truly universal form of Catholicism; nor do they always respect the requirements of mature co-responsibility, and sometimes they do not even respect the basic rights of the human person or those of different nations. In certain sectors of the Roman Curia, there is often prejudice, a one-sided handling of information, and even positions that seem to be unaware of the ethno-centric culture of Europe in regards to Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Quoted from "Letter by P. Casaldàliga to Pope John Paul II"

3. THE THIRD WOUND: “ECCLESIOCENTRISM”

From the overview given in the previous section, springs a new and quite surprising element: the ecclesiastical institution does not know how to operate in a democratic way.

We will begin by writing a little about the feast of Christ the King, the significance of which should be able to clarify what we mean. Christ the King is not a celebration of ecclesiastical vindication, but instead should represent the believer’s submission to the incomprehensible wisdom of God. The idea of a crucified King seems ridiculous to the enlightened and scandalous to the pious, as St. Paul recalled, and yet according to the famous expression in medieval liturgy “God reigns from the wood” of the cross¹⁹. For a Kingdom “of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace” (as the preface goes at the Mass celebrating the feast of Christ the King), cannot be obtained through power and through carrying out miraculous spectacles, but is instead reached through the loving gift of surrendering one’s own life. This is the wisdom of God.

Two ecclesiologies

In accordance with this line of thought, it is easy to compare the two ecclesiologies that struggle against each other: one understands the community of believers in accordance with the language of the Gospels, as being like the yeast, or like grains of salt or seeds...

The other understands the Church as more of a stronghold, like the “residential area” of a sick planet, as an institutional power (or “perfect society”), that will compete with the powers of nations, and not in order to obtain its own freedom but rather to impose its own way of thinking.

It seems to us that only the first of these ecclesiologies responds correctly to the plan of Jesus on the Kingdom of God: “the way of the Church is man” (Pope John Paul II, RH 14) and man’s mission will therefore need to be along the lines of “losing himself among the masses in order to spread God’s seed” acting in a similar way to yeast or salt. In our opinion, the ecclesiastical institution appears to think the opposite: that the way of mankind is through the Church and that the Church’s mission is to “compel people to come in that my house may be filled”, using the words of an expression from the Gospel taken completely out of context here (Lk 14:23). This is what makes today’s Church so often seem as though it does not know how to act democratically.

Referring to this image of the yeast, the basic value that unites believers and non-believers is that of universal fraternity, which was emphasised so much through Vatican II and Pope Paul VI. Christianity brings a foundation and fulfilment to this value: that is the divine affiliation or connection of all mankind. And in turn, this foundation becomes a necessary part of bringing about this fra-

ternity: through “the liberty of the children of God” (cf. Rom, 8:21; Gal 4:31). The Christian may think that fraternity without some form of affiliation is flawed (and perhaps even non-existent); but at the same time an affiliation without fraternity is false and even hypocritical. Where a *genuine* fraternity exists or is sought, it can bring about an acceptance of this “connection” that is neither forced nor deliberate, and that only God is aware of.

On the other hand, in relation to the image of the stronghold, fraternity can only be understood as being something that is of secondary importance, or as something relating to humanity that has become degraded. This is why the Church, seeing itself to be in possession of this treasure of divine affiliation which is our most profound truth, focuses on itself –and to coin a phrase – sees itself as being the “first world” of the spirit, looking on the rest of the world as being “underdeveloped”. This is where affiliation imperceptibly becomes, not a foundation for fraternity, but instead is used as an argument against it. And fraternity ceases to be a proven criteria of this divine affiliation, instead being portrayed as an unrealistic delusion. This horizontal affinity is then viewed as an obstacle (or form of temptation possibly) to the vertical connection with God.

The first understanding of fraternity cannot pray the Our Father prayer without a feeling of justification because it understands the prayer as a call to *universal* fraternity: the adjective “our”, added to the invocation of God the Father, is undoubtedly uncomfortable,

but at the same time very promising. On the other hand, the second model recites the Our Father prayer quite happily because they only pay attention to the word Father, and understand the adjective “our” only in terms of those that pray with them.

In other words: if “you are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13), the benefit of salt does not exist in itself, but rather in the fact that it makes food taste better. The purpose of salt is only for it to be used with food, it has no purpose in itself. In the same way the glory of the Church can only be found in the flavour or impression it leaves on humanity. On the other hand, according to the second model, the glory of a stronghold (or residential area) is that the surrounding town land cannot penetrate it. This led to the prohibition of terminology such as “insertion”, which in recent years investigated different types of religious life.

We feel that this second model turns the Church into a sort of “synagogue” (which has the consequence, paradoxically, of making it more “worldly” in the negative sense of the term because it leans towards this worldly temptation to believe that security makes us stronger²⁰). The first model leaves the Church out in the open as it were, which gives it the type of liberty from which truth springs (Jn 8:32): because the truth that all humanity are children of God is the very truth that *consequently* makes us all brothers. This fact is as beautiful and true, as it is difficult to fully realise. This state of openness is that in which the Church is called to live as believers in God, rather than solely believing in itself or in its own security.

This is why Vatican II clearly chose to go for the first model: the Church “serves as a leaven and as a kind of human soul for society” (GS 40).

Vatican II

We are aware of the great difficulty presented by what we have been saying. But we also believe that, if the Church opts for the second of the models described, it will lose another historic opportunity because it will become like tasteless salt, or a dim candle, because it shields itself from the wind so as not to be extinguished, instead of being turned into a blazing fire which the wind does not blow out but only makes stronger.

And we fear that, even though Vatican II signified a clear and definitive choice for the first of the models described, today the Church is blatantly withdrawing to the second option. This is why we are quoting several texts from Vatican II that are clearly in favour of what we have said.

1. In relation to the Church, Vatican II felt that:

– “it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds” (GS 1);

– the Church’s purpose was to serve and not to rule (Ad OH 7). And for this reason,

– wishing to “offer to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men” (GS 3); but acknowledging itself to be at the same time

– humble, as if to say to the faithful that “without always having at hand the

solution to particular problems” (GS 33), and that “let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution” (GS 43).

2. This awareness of its mission led it to admit that it was:

– concerned “so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus” (GS 27);

– guilty “believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism” (GS 19),

– “Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on Earth (and)... in so far as she is an institution ... here in Earth.” (UR 6).

3. And for all these reasons it sought to reach out to the world:

– based on the conviction that “The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power” (DH 1); and that the man who strays still continues to retain the dignity of the human person (DH 11);

– from the acknowledgement that the Church “can be abundantly and variously helped by the world... from... individuals and from society as a whole” (GS 40) and that “how richly (the Church) has profited by the history and development of humanity” (GS 44);

– and acknowledging that it needs the help of “believers and unbelievers... men of every rank and condition” (GS 44) on major topical issues.

4. From this perspective the Church publicly professed itself to:

– acknowledge that “worthy elements are found in today’s social movements, especially an evolution toward unity, a process of wholesome socialization and of association in civic and economic realms” (GS 42) and “by virtue of the Gospel committed to her, (the Church) proclaims the rights of man and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today” (GS 41). This caused it to feel:

– “...bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system” (GS 42). And finally:

– “(the Church) will even give up the exercise of certain rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness...” (GS 76)

A Church like this seems to us to be the kind of Church that God wants and for this reason, we want it too. All of this does not go against “man’s call to communion with God” (GS 19), but instead should be considered as the pathway towards it. This is why Pope Paul VI, in his closing speech spoke of the “*religious value* of our Council”, precisely because it had promoted the human person.

The current image

Today there are ministers who, in private, may share these feelings and admire the words and themes of the Council. Yet when it comes to publicly acting these out, they seem to forget these opinions and instead give another impression of the Church: a Church that is

distanced from mankind, considering mankind to be the enemy that has lost its way, unless it should choose to return to it. This is why it is more concerned with its authority than with its function. And for this reason also, it is less fearful of approaching the rich Epulon-type character than it is to approach the poor Lazarus. It believes that it must collaborate with mankind in an imposing way, rather than through dialogue, because it sees itself as being in possession of all the answers to all the questions of history. This is why it feels called upon to impose the truth in an authoritative way, and it is also more ready to proclaim the benefits that the Church has brought to mankind, rather than the benefits that mankind has brought to the Church. Hence the waiver of privileges that seem useful to their mission but tarnish the purity of their testimony, is not seen as an option.

All this is of course very understandable and all too natural on a human level. And yet, dare we say it using a play on words, it is not all that supernatural. In the Christian community, we should focus on the words of Jesus: “but (let it) not so with you” (Lk 22:26). We are not claiming that what we have said is closed to discussion or that, in the face of every problem that arises, better ways cannot be found through dialogue that are more faithful to the evangelical ideal.

And so we will give a couple of examples. The Church in Spain has still not learnt how to instruct the faithful on the basic principle that *something that is legal in a secular and democratic society, does not necessarily lie well with Christian morality.*

The Church remains committed to the idea that morality and law are the same, thus ignoring the meaning of civil law, and presenting itself as the legislator. And then one of two things happens: either Christians (in regards to money and property) cling to what is allowed by law, which is in fact very far from what social Christian morality demands, or (in relation to sexual morality) they go out on the streets with the idea of toppling governments whose laws seem to them to go against morality. In both cases, what becomes clear is an inability of the ecclesiastical institution to independently instruct Christians in their faith, without referring to civil law.

Another example: the Spanish Church should acknowledge that it has not done too much in regards to fulfilling its commitment to move towards a state of self-financing, to avoid giving the anti-evangelical impression that it is dependent on a State –and a secular one at that. It is true that the Church has carried out a great amount of social work that

has been very useful to the State, in spite of the painful conflicts that have recently taken place between benevolent organisations (such as Caritas or Manos Unidas) and the authorities. It is also true that many voices from the public and from the media seem to be taking sides when they believe that this problem has been resolved, and speak of the “great legacy” of the Church: however, a great part of these donations are unproductive, and devour huge amounts of money in maintenance and running costs (heating, etc.). Yet the Church does not ask for entrance fees in order to gain entry to sites of pilgrimage such as the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Sea or the Cathedral of Leon, as the State does in order to visit the Prado Museum, for example... Courage is needed to tackle each specific situation with analysis, dialogue and publicity, searching for that which –along with Paulo Freire– we could call the new evangelical way forward.

John Paul, brother, allow me just one more word of fraternal criticism on the nature of the Pope. On the more traditional titles “Holy Father”, “His Holiness”... –like other ecclesiastical titles such as Eminency, Excellency– on a human level, they are clearly not very evangelical and even somewhat extravagant. “Do not call yourself father or Master” says the Lord. Would it not be more evangelical –and also more in keeping with current sensibilities– to simplify this elegance, these gestures, this distance that exists within our Church...

Quoted from “Letter by P. Casaldáliga to Pope John Paul II”

4. THE FOURTH WOUND: THE DIVISION OF CHRISTIANS

In more official spheres, awareness is growing today of a certain unspoken refusal to acknowledge what Vatican II expressed so intensely: that the division of churches is a great sin that contradicts the express will of Christ (Jn 17:22), and that the Catholic Church felt ready and called to accompany and work with all Christian denominations in search of unity. It is also worth pointing out what Cardinal Congar said when he applied an evangelical saying to this matter: if the tree is known for its fruit, one cannot deny that other Christian denominations will have produced (along with the inevitable sin that is in every man's nature), good fruits of Christian quality that also demonstrate the presence of the Spirit within them. This is why Vatican II was not afraid of calling these denominations churches, and decided to search for some kind of unity with them, on an equal scale, and all the while obeying God revealed through Jesus Christ.

But recently we have heard official voices insisting that the Church should continue to remain a single Church, and that its essential unity has not been broken: instead they would say that some churches had separated from it, and that what needs to be done in order to restore unity is for these churches to return to that one Mother Church. In this way, they have distorted a text that Vatican II deliberately corrected when it said that the Church of Christ "is present in" (rather than "is") the Catholic

Church (LG 8). Today it would be instead implied that "is present in" means exactly the same as "is". In keeping with this, there is a sense of a deliberate or understood refusal –to call Protestant and Orthodox denominations "Churches".

One example of this whole reactive mentality can be found in the incomprehensible reaction of the newspaper of the Roman Curia against the book that was published twenty years ago by K. Rahner and H. Fries: "The unity of the churches, an actual possibility". Like any "new proposition", the book had its limits and flaws; but this should have been seen as a call to improve upon it, and not an invitation to condemn it globally. It is still true today that, at the very least, there is a real possibility of making significant progress towards union.

Sometimes the reluctance to take this path towards unity is out of fear of the Church of Rome losing power. A fear that (as in the times of Pope Pius IX in relation to the issue of the Pontifical states), disguises itself as being loyal to Christ. Other times, and on the part of other churches, it is due to a certain conformist sluggishness in the face of this request to "leave one's country" as God asked Abraham, in search of that promised unity.

The term "communion" that is so often used to do with the Church, thus becomes twisted in order to obstruct the path towards unity, as if this pathway re-

presented a threat to communion, without recognising that the greatest omission and the greatest sin against ecclesiastical communion is precisely that of the division of the churches. This is why it should be remembered that communion and unity are not the same as uniformity: that would be the easy way out. Communion is the unity of plurality and for this reason is a call that brings with it difficulty and hard work.

It is also undeniable on a very positive level that, as a result of Vatican II, individual members of all churches worked together with the aim of reaching agreements, in order to make important progress in areas such as the ministry (Lima Agreement), justification, and even the ministry of Peter²¹. Yet when these agreements reach official levels they do not lead to practical initiatives, but instead seem to become archived in the bowels of some Curial office until they are forgotten.

We will not be adding to this brief reflection by pointing out specific path-

ways or routes towards unity. But we will once more evoke the famous Machadian advice: “you make progress by walking”. Thus we conclude by lamenting the impression that the Church gives today which is that of “not walking”. And this is serious because we are so sure that if Christianity does not face the third millennium under a united front, it will not be able to make any progress in the so-called “mission” territories, or even in those lands that are traditionally considered to be Christian. And this responsibility facing Christianity is the greatest responsibility facing us as individual Christians.

The lack of unity among Christians should pain us like an open wound or a broken bone: or to use a better image, it should be viewed as a wound affecting the very Body of Christ. It is only from this perspective of pain that we can force ourselves to move forwards, in pain and yet confidently, towards this unity through plurality that God asks of us all.

No one can deny with the spirit of indifference that women continue to be extremely marginalized in the Church: in Canonical legislation, in liturgy, in the ministries, and in the ecclesiastical structure. In relation to a faith and a community based on that Good News that does not discriminate between “Jew and Greek, slave and free, man and woman”, this discrimination against women in the Church can never be justified. Patriarchal cultural traditions still cannot suppress the innovative teachings of the Gospel, and though they can possibly be used to explain the past, they cannot justify the present, even less the future.

Quoted from “Letter by P. Casaldàliga to Pope John Paul II”

5. THE FIFTH WOUND: THE HELLENIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY

The adaptation of Christianity to different cultures in the world and into the Greco-Latin mentality has been one of its greatest achievements, and we are afraid that modern-day Christianity would not be capable of such work in today's world. However, our way of questioning and defining reality is not the same as that of the Greco-Latin world. This is why a large majority of the dogmatic formulations of faith of the Church, which clearly have an indisputable value, seem so incomprehensible to today's society and devoid of meaning. Experts believe that, in today's world at least, the hellenization of Christianity has led to a loss of its Biblical roots. Nevertheless, there are other authoritative figures who believe that the Greco-Latin angle given to Christianity is the best, if not the only possible option, for today and the future. The Church should never forget the words of Pope John XXIII at the opening of Vatican II, which we will be quoting later on.

Throughout the 20th century there has been much evidence that has been taken as signs of this malaise and the Church's need to leave its Greco-Latin slant behind (although, we repeat this, we are not discounting its benefits): for instance, we have the issue of modernism with its focus on religious experience and the issue of liberation theology with its focus on a more "performative" dogma, that is capable of launching a coordinated movement with a radical following.

But the official Church did not know how to identify what had in fact been signs of the times in those initial flawed attempts. Going against the mission of the Servant of Yahweh and the Messiah, it only knew how to "break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick"²² (and it would actually be more correct to say: stamp out budding possibilities). It thus condemned two innovative views, and set up a virtual witch-hunt against any voices that indicated inaccuracies or imperfections, even though these voices eventually turned out to be very prophetic. In this way, it put a stop to seeking answers through study and dialogue to any issue raised by both trends. And it has to be said that on this issue, both problems would have found a speedier resolution from a less Greco-Roman perspective and instead from a more Semitic one²³.

Already at the start of the century, A. Harnack had written that the inquisitorial method is the worst way of understanding what someone else has said²⁴. Our Church still does not seem to have learned from this elemental truth. And the worst part is that the majority of those people condemned were people of excellent intentions, and overlooking the inevitable errors that would have occurred at the start of their studies, they sincerely believed that they were serving Christianity and the Church.

We will quote a couple of examples referring to each of these two strands, (modernism and liberation theology).

1. In 1904, A. Loisy wrote a letter to Pope Pius X, in which he said: “I want to live and die in communion with the Catholic Church. I do not want to contribute to the ruin of the faith in my country. *It is not in my power to destroy within myself the result of my work. In the measure of my capabilities* I submit to the judgement imposed against my writings by the Congregation of the Holy See. And as a testimony of my good will, and in the hope of pacifying souls, I am ready to abandon my teaching in Paris, and also suspend the scientific publications that I was working on”.

Could he have done any more? Nevertheless, Pope Pius X, paying attention to the phrases that we have highlighted in italics, wrote to the Archbishop of Paris: “the letter appeals to my heart, but it is not written from the heart”: a judgement on his *intentions*, that even a Pope could not have known. It is true that certain scholarly opinions of Loisy have since been surpassed, but on issues such as the historicity of the accounts in Genesis or of the Gospels themselves (read using the modern criteria of historicity), or the concordance between the accounts of the Resurrection or of the origin of the Church..., Loisy was much more in the right than Pope Pius X. Loisy was trying to explain the faith, while the latter was favouring a faith for the Church that would be “set in stone”²⁵.

2. A European theologian, such as J. B. Metz, asked this about liberation theology: is it daring to suppose that suddenly here is a new and clearer idea of what being close to Jesus entails, of what is promised and of what is requir-

ed to follow him? And he put this question alongside, according to him, the consequence of making Jesus appear remote, even adding that he was not saying this in the spirit of denouncing the faith –but rather with a certain sadness and uneasiness. And the result of this is a Christianity that resembles a religious home for the bourgeoisie, a religion free from danger, but also a possible source of comfort²⁶.

We sincerely believe that “the dust (of the 20th century) has turned into the mud (of the 21st century)”. We are also aware of another “dangerous promise” from Vatican II that has to be faced, which is that of the so-called dialogue and co-existence of religions, which has now been apparently disregarded. It only remains for us to point out that all forms of inquisition (even though they may not physically hurt people), are much more harmful to the Gospel in the long term, no matter how much they may appear to address matters in the short-term. And again we use a quotation, this time from the physicist Andrei Sajarov: intolerance is the fear of not being right. This is the impression given to people today by many ecclesiastical authorities through their words and actions.

Taking a moment to look at some anecdotes from our country, in Spain today, Catholic publishing houses (that are so worthy for working in an environment of exclusion and cultural marginalisation), are today bearing a heavy burden placed on them by the Church hierarchy, for reasons that have nothing to do with the truth of the faith, but are instead related to ecclesiastical party politics. It is shameful that a work such as the “Islamic cate-

chism”, published by a Catholic publishing house, praiseworthy for being ecumenical, for its teaching and for what it provided to many Muslim clerics, saw its publication halted with arguments that suggested it would encourage indifference or trivialise religion. We feel that the modern hierarchy should consider three evangelical phrases very carefully that demonstrate three attitudes that Jesus instilled. The first: no one should be prevented from doing good simply because “he does not follow us” (Lk 9:50). The second: when you feel persecuted, you should not resort, as the apostles did, to ask that “fire come down from Heaven”, because this will lead to the accusation from the Lord that: “you do not know what manner of spirit you are of” (Lk 9:55). And thirdly, re-read very carefully the harsh diatribe of Jesus against the “Church leaders” of his day in chapter 23 of St. Matthew, in particular recalling the commentary of various Holy Fathers: that these words were not written against the Jews, but rather so that we ourselves would not repeat them...

According to sources of our faith, the Spirit of God was bestowed “on all people” and not only on western or European people. The specific work that this brings with it in regards to the notion of truth and revelation, to the very understanding of God, to the importance of love over power, to the focus on suffering and that which Metz describes as “*memoria passionis*”... have been dealt with on many other occasions. We feel we can conclude this chapter by quoting the words of Pope John XXIII, at the opening of Vatican II:

“The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the

way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration”. And the Pope first offered the reason for this principle: “from the *renewed, serene, and tranquil* adherence, to all the teaching of the Church... the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration... through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought”. Since “our duty is not only to guard this precious treasure, *as if we were concerned only with antiquity*, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us”. If it were only a matter of repeating what had gone before, the Pope added: “For this, a Council was not necessary”. (ed. of the BAC, p. 753).

We are afraid that our Church too often gives the impression of “only being concerned with antiquity”, and we are afraid that this is due to the fact that clinging to the truths of the faith is not “renewed, serene or tranquil”. This is all the more regrettable because, as the Gospel says, “the good shepherd knows his sheep” (Jn 10:14). And it seems to us that many Bishops and Monsignors are not aware of the strength and admirable struggle faced by many Christians against difficulties, darkness, disapproval and with little free time to devote to this effort, an effort that faces many human beings who hope to maintain and live out their faith. They are admirable, and yet are often seen as being reprehensible, even compared to “prodigal sons” who instead of meeting the open arms of their father, meet only with obstacles on their journey home.

CONCLUSIÓN

We wanted to write these pages from the following perspective:

– We are convinced about the truth of what we have written, and yet we do not claim to have all the answers. We only want this to be part of a much broader dialogue, rather than being completely dismissed from the start.

– We humbly bear witness to our love of the Church, without which it would have been a lot easier and less dangerous to close our eyes and devote ourselves to a more peaceful life.

– With what we have said, we are not claiming that in a figurative sense, the doors are wide open to God’s Kingdom, similar to the Castilian phrase “Castile is wide”. We know that the door to the Kingdom of God is not wide (Lk 13:24), or in any case, if Castile is wide, we could also continue the metaphor by saying that it is as wide as it is arid, harsh, difficult, in fact it was that harshness that led to the expression “old Castilian”.

– Neither are we trying to lose the identity of the Agape God (who is a communion of different identities), nor of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, nor of the Spirit, the force that brings this God to us (through revelation and salvation).

– Neither are we trying to deny that Christianity springs from a fundamental scandal which is that of the Cross (a

scandal for those from within Christianity and a lunacy to those outside: 1 Cor 1:23). But this is more an issue of –as J. Ratzinger warned many years ago– *not using that scandal in order to justify other failings that are distinct from it* such as our sluggishness, our fear, our sectarianism, and our desire for power...

– Finally, we are in no way claiming to be the only voice in this community of believers, and neither are we demanding that what we have said should be universally accepted. We only want to be one voice heard in the Church, and therefore we ask the right for our voice to be heard, and we ask for respect so that we are not completely discredited for simply being troublesome.

The revelation of God says nothing (or at least very little) on historical investigations, nature, the evolution of sexuality, bio-ethical issues, or the woman and her role. These are issues that must be resolved through the dialogue of human reason; and not in a sovereign way, but autonomously. And yet the institution of the Church seems to want to become a guardian of revelation and claim ownership of reason.

On appealing to reason and its search for universality, we are not saying that we would accept anything and be said and led by the wheels of pro-

gress. Instead the Body and Blood of Christ will direct us: with the life Christ led and the sacrifice He made so that everyone can have life in a new type of relationship with God. We are talking about avoiding disasters such as that of the Protestant Reformation, or the late petitions and changes that were made at Trent (whose reforms still met with huge resistance).

Experience can be learned from, and it gives us a reason to hope, for example, in history, progress is never made through revolutions that end well, but rather through the blood of martyrs that fertilises arid ground (something similar also happens in the political history of nations!): in other words, things that are sometimes vehemently rejected at first, end up being quietly accepted as the new way forward by those who initially rejected them.

Members of the Church, first and foremost

Therefore: the reason why we wrote this booklet, apart from the need to “comfort” the people of God (Is 40:1), to a certain extent at least, was our belief that Christianity today is facing a very significant period of evangelisation that it should not let slip by. By recalling what was said at the start: Rahner prophesied that the Christian of the 21st century would either be a “mystic” or would not be Christian at all. And yet our Church has become incapable of initiating an authentic spiritual experience: we are lacking genuine “mystagogues” (spiritual teachers), and instead we have too many so-called teachers of moral reason.

And this is happening at a time when the crisis of Modernity (already talked about by Nietzsche, and later in so-called post-modernism) has awakened a hunger for spirituality in many people. Modernity believed that the great values that would actually end up tearing Christianity apart –freedom and human rights– sprang exclusively from human reason. It did not see that its more radical source was entirely evangelical and actually originated from the experience of God communicated through Jesus of Nazareth. Cardinal Y. Congar later wrote about what happened when he said that when the Church forgets its evangelical values, God makes them appear outside of the Church. And this is how the irony of G. K. Chesterton can be viewed when he said that the modern world is “full of Christian ideas gone mad”.

In fact: liberty and human rights make up the fundamental position of Christianity in relation to history, (that Jesus described as the Kingdom of God). Christian anthropology underlines the similarities (or dynamic) that exist between liberty and love, showing that our liberty is not a matter of egotistically asserting our own self, but instead should be a call to surrender ourselves out of love and reason²⁷. Human rights are not a question of putting oneself forward as a pale example of human nature²⁸, but are instead based on the divine dignity of the human being, made in the image and likeness of God, and essentially a child of God that is brought to life through Jesus Christ.

Without this foundation (and even though the values of Modernity can be

described as being profoundly rational), many people today tend to think that the great ideals of Modernity are just adolescent dreams that should be abandoned when the person reaches maturity. An example of this (in a globalised world) would be the criticism of western thought in some quarters of Asia that is used as an excuse for not accepting human rights, (or at least, our understanding of human rights). For this reason, there have been instances of people returning to Christianity because they see it as the “last resort” for *Modernity*²⁹ or, because of this return to the need for spirituality, so as to avoid that tragic logical need for proof that seems to have been left behind by recent history.

In spite of its failings, we owe the transmission of the Gospel message and the communication of the person and life of the incarnate God to the Church. From within the Church, and in full accordance with its teachings on public opinion, we can exercise our right to criticise certain aspects of it, something that would perhaps not be possible in other public institutions.

From these observations, we would like to conclude with the clear and unambiguous affirmation of our belong-

ing to the Church and, in spite of everything said, our happiness to be part of that Church. And we would like to follow the example of genuine loyalty that we have learned from so many masters that make us proud today (Blondel, Teilhard, Congar, Rahner, Arrupe...). Although they were criticised and reviled as rebels, they knew how to demonstrate through their lives and their suffering that they loved the Church “to the bitter end”, and that their “rebellion” was merely the necessary course of action for their incredibly solid faith. To finish, we will quote the words of the last General of the Jesuits, on the centenary of the birth of Pedro Arrupe (2007):

P. Arrupe was also tested in his love for the Church. His desire to renew the Society, in keeping with the dynamic rhythm of Vatican II, met with incomprehension from some and even interventions from the Church that he so loved with the heart of Ignatius. Together, S. José Pignatelli and Pedro Arrupe went deeper into the mystery of God’s will which requires sacrifices so the Church can survive, and which sometimes imposes the duty of suffering with loving humility, at the hands of the Church³⁰.

The College of Cardinals is sometimes privileged with powers and functions that are difficult to reconcile with the rights and functions that are more ecclesiastically suited to the Holy See.

Quoted from “Letter by P. Casaldáliga to Pope John Paul II”

1. An allusion to one of the first books by U. Von Balthasar called "Razing the Bastions" (Schleifung der Bastionen).
2. PABLO SUESS, in the collaborative work: *Bajar de la cruz a los pobres. Cristología de la liberación*, (Coming down from the cross to the poor. The Christology of liberation), published in 2007 by the Association of Third World Theologians; pg. 254.
3. *El País*, 30th November 2007.
4. Cf. R. BROWN *Las iglesias que los apóstoles nos dejaron*. (The churches that the apostles left us), Bilbao 1986; M. Whitte, *From Jesus to Christianity*. Estella 2007.
5. At that time they were: the division between the clergy and the faithful; the lack of training given to the clergy; the lack of unity among Bishops; the appointment of the same and the servitude of Church property.
6. On the rich significance of this word, which means both freedom and authority (or an authority that springs from the freedom of God) see: "La autoridad de Jesús" (The authority of Jesus). IN J. I. González Faus: *La lógica del Reinado de Dios*, (The Logic of God's Kingdom) The "aquí y ahora" (Here and Now) series of booklets, Santander 1991, pgs. 19-36.
7. *Journal d'un théologien*, pgs. 303 and 426 translated.
8. *Mon journal du Concile*, I, pgs. 576 and 71 translated.
9. JT, 295 translated.
10. MJDC I, 180 translated.
11. MJDC I, 115 translated
12. Quoted in MJDC I, 357
13. MJDC II 234 translated
14. The reform of the papacy, 225
15. Address to the Roman Curia in 1963, AAS 55 (1963) 797
16. *Motu proprio "Ministeria Quaedam"* on minor orders.
17. *Octogesima adveniens*, 22-24.
18. See for example the chapter "Towards an evangelical reform of the Church" in the work by the CiJ: *Church, where have you come from, where are you going to*, Barcelona 1989, pgs. 95-128.
19. "regnavit a ligno Deus"
20. The Church is appealing for "a platform from which to evangelise" here and this generic formulation has a variety of meanings. However, we can see that this "evangelisation" is becoming, not so much an announcement of the implementation of the Lordship of Jesus, but instead something that resembles merely "speaking well of the Church". And we believe that one example of this in our country can be seen in what is happening with COPE: a Catholic broadcasting station which, in our opinion, does not evangelise (and sometimes even shocks us by its lack of charity), and instead spends much of its time praising the Church.
21. As one example of this last point, we recall the book by O. CLEMENT, *Rome autrement*.
22. Cf. Is 42: 1-4; Mt 12: 18-20.
23. To the two cases quoted we should add the issue of the relationship between science and faith, or science and theology, and the cruel persecution of the prophet Teilhard de Chardin (whose writings were successful even though he was discredited after his death). Nevertheless, in this case, the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities was not as negative as it was in the two cases to which we are referring.

24. Theologische Literaturzeitung, 23rd January 1904, p. 59.
25. These translated quotations from Loisy and from Pope Pius X can be seen in the article by DOMINGO MELERO, En torno a la crisis modernista, in "Cuadernos de la diáspora", n° 18 (May - December 2006), pgs. 197-198.
26. Memoria passionis, Santander 2007, p. 146.
27. It is shocking to realise that the Nazi legislation against the Jews in 1935 was called "The Constitution of Liberty" (Die Verfassung der Freiheit). The human being is capable of corrupting everything: not only the idea of God but also the idea of those great values such as love, justice or freedom... In this sense, the harsh observation of T. Adorno, when he stated that Auschwitz was not an exception but rather a consequence of our world, deserves a lot more attention than it is usually given. As Christians, we can humbly testify that it is through the experience of following Jesus that we find numerous ways of avoiding these perversions, even though our lack of faith often obscures them from us.
28. The argument of Simone de Beauvoir that the human being "is the best we have" does not succeed in restoring the universality of these rights due to all human beings.
29. J. CL. GUILLEBAUD, Comment je suis redevenu chrétien, Paris 2007.
30. P.H. Kolvenbach, Sermon at the funeral of Pedro Arrupe, 7th February, 199?