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# THE THIRD MILLENNIUM A CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH

By *Cristianisme i Justícia*

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A careful look at the history of the second millennium could probably highlight some of our many errors... How can we keep silent in the face of so many forms of violence perpetrated in the name of Faith; Wars waged in the name of religion, tribunals of the Inquisition and other forms of violation of human rights... *It is necessary that the Church too, following the guidelines of Vatican II should analyse on her own initiative the obscure aspects of her history, evaluating them in the light of the principles of the Gospel... This could be one of the virtues of the next jubilee.* This re-examination will not put in jeopardy in any way the moral prestige of the Church, which on the contrary could even be reinforced by the testimonies of loyalty and courage shown in the acknowledgement of the errors committed by her ministers and, in a certain sense, in her name.

At the end of this second millennium we need to make an examination of conscience: Where is our place at the moment? Where has Christ led us to? Where have we deviated from the teachings of the Gospel?

John Paul II<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION: SYMPTOMS FOR A DIAGNOSIS

The ecclesiological destiny of the twentieth century has been paradoxical. We could depict it in a few lines:

1. In the early years of the twentieth century some ventured to announce that it was going to be “the century of the Church”. The Church, nevertheless, up to the time of Pius XII lived in point of fact what has been termed a period of “splendid isolation”. With the Second Vatican Council, one of the biggest ecclesiological happenings in the whole of the history of Christianity took place. In this Council, it appeared that the Church was recovering the “credibility motive” that the First Vatican Council had dreamt of a hundred years previously.

But the century is ending with *an acute crisis of the ecclesial institution*, which has been described as “winter” or “involution”. These words refer to a policy that intends to get round the crisis not by facing the problems with a spirit of faith, but merely by regarding them as “prophecies of calamities” or acts of self-affirmation or taking refuge in the past. With this conduct, the dreamt of “credibility motive” is turned into an “excuse for people losing their faith”.

The result of these policies is that the institution does not seem capable of converting itself into Asiatic or African, despite the fact that the centre of history keeps shifting towards Asia. On the other hand, there does not seem to be a real cultural adaptation of the ecclesiastical institution in the Western Modern (or Post-modern) Age and perhaps for this reason there has arisen in the West a massive and silent exodus that can be stopped neither by the crisis of western paganism nor the birth of new religious search moves nor even by what is called “a new evangelising opportunity”.

It is true that there does not exist today a single institution (whether governmental, political, international...) that is not affected by a “loss of credibility”. But this does not exempt the Church from examining her own problem and looking out for its causes.

2. *Is the diagnosis we have just mentioned a bit too pessimistic? We feel it is so only in part.*

Because we cannot deny that after Vatican II a new type of believer has been emerging that is no longer a result of sociological pressure or of indoctrination in early childhood, but the fruit of a true encounter with Jesus Christ and a mature decision of faith. And also because a growing release of ties has been produced between many ecclesiastical sectors and socially conservative groups.

Nevertheless, it is precisely among these “adult” Christians that there exists very often a greatest disillusionment with the ecclesiastical institution. As a result, there is the danger of ecclesial meaning (which is intrinsic to the Christian faith and to the following of Jesus) being relegated to groups that are “residual”, fundamentalist and alien to the march of history.

In all probability, one may point to the year 1968, and more precisely, to the appearance of “*Humanae Vitae*” as a real bombshell in the way of keeping credibility afloat, which unleashed a crisis of confidence which, later, some have tried to attribute to Vatican II and to the Post-Council.

3. This is our situation. It could be objected with reason that *the mere fall in numbers, in a world*

*that is each day more opposed to what St. Paul called “the wisdom of the Cross”, is not in itself an alarming signal.*

This objection merits looking into. Even the “people of God” of the Old Testament went through epochs that were analogous to those of medieval “Christianity”, and other eras in which there only appeared to exist the fidelity of a small “remainder” which, according to the Bible, would finally end up saving the rest of the people. The first Christians, that are now so frequently regarded as a point of reference by the church of the twentieth century, did not enjoy either very much of sociological credibility.

And if from the first century we pass to the twentieth, we will come across the case of Latin America where more frequently than the loss of faith typical of the First World, we perceive a “change of church”. Well, these changes have causes that are so tremendously varied that we find it seemingly impossible to establish them in univocal analysis terms.

Big coffee-estate landowners in Guatemala refuse *as a general principle* to hire “Catholic” manual labourers as they could be aware of their rights from the theology of liberation: in these circumstances catholics are strongly tempted to leave the Church. In other places, members of some old “ecclesial base communities”, unable to bear the global rejection of the hierarchy, have joined some sects impelled by the necessity to feel themselves part of an institution where they feel warmth and not exclusion. In still other places of Latin America it is not infrequent that members of “charismatic” communities end up being hotbeds for nourishing spiritualistic sects of North American origin. There have been cases too of candidates of the ecclesiastic ministry switching over to ordination in some protestant community as they did not feel themselves capable of maintaining celibacy...

The causes are so tremendously diverse that it does not seem possible to trace them down to one same symptom.

4. It should seem then that the Church *should not be alarmed in principle* about the loss of social standing.

But it should, on the other hand, ask itself if this discredit is due to her “not wanting to know in this world anything other than Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 2,2), or if it is due to *that other law of history by which religious institutions end up “extinguishing the Spirit”* (1 Thes. 5,19) instead of incarnating it.

This is the main dilemma. In all logic, we should add that those who choose the first alternative as a solution to this dilemma, (that is to say, that the ecclesial discredit is due *only* to the rejection of the Cross by the world) should not be over-worried about the loss of their credibility, nor should they try to counter-balance this relying on projects to recover it, or on operations in media communication, which in reality only reflect their not wanting to consider the second alternative of the proposed dilemma.

On the other hand, those that give their support to the second alternative (without denying the first) do so because it is a known fact that all along the second millennium, the ecclesiastic institution refused on too many occasions to listen to voices that were calling for a radical reform “in capite et in membris”, and while failing to learn from the crises which she was being led to by

her position of power<sup>2</sup>, she has systematically unauthorised every voice that has asked for reform (among which figure the voices of many saints that have since been canonised). Not till the Church suffered the rupture caused by Luther, did she engage upon a “counter-reform” which came a little late as it was carried out after the trauma of the division and as a consequence, with fear mingled with care more to protect herself from “the other” rather than to listen to what the other was saying. (Naturally, one can censure from the *theological* point of view the rupture of Luther. But what we cannot deny is that from the *historical* point of view, it was the obstinate refusal to any reform that ended up provoking this rupture).

*5. And so the Church reaches the third millennium divided, as a minority, with lessened credibility and with certain internal perplexity. One must add too, with some very important outbursts of life and Christian quality, a freer and more respectful faith, with greater spiritual experience, a greater following of Jesus and a greater option in favour of the poor...), all of which are capable of yielding fruit totally unknown before.*

And this Church is going to have to face a world that is also in crisis, and of which it could be convenient to trace a few characteristics:

— A world that is very unified technically and economically and at the same time very plural in cultures, historical eras and ideas.

— A world without absolute foundations for co-existence. With the danger that, lacking the Absolute Foundation each one absolutises the partial and tries to conceive coexistence from the angle of his absolutised partial. From this conception, there would emerge a thousand temptations to resort to racism, xenophobia, imperialism and violent fundamentalism.

— A world with a clear consciousness of liberty and adulthood. Hence,

— A world which values democracy and seeks forms to control power. And a world in which efforts for the full liberation and equality of women will stand out as one of the clear signals of the Spirit –as was pointed out by John XXIII 35 years ago (cf. PT 39-45)–.

— A world plagued by injustice: according to the United Nations, if two centuries ago, the differences between rich and poor countries were double, today they have risen to about sixty times. This trend is on the rise. And these differences are more perceptible than ever on account of the invasion of propaganda and of MCS. This could lead to a thousand reactions on the part of the desperate, ranging from massive unstoppable migrations to even violent influxes of these people.

— A world where everything is commercialised and where even the most sacred things of life are converted into simple market material;

— A world tired of much talk and incredulous before all the big global explicative systems; however, deeply sensitive to concrete biographies in which coherence and human grandeur as intrinsic values are clearly shown;

— A world with a species of ecological “cancer”; and infected with a species of arms or nuclear HIV the outcome of which we do not know.

— A world profoundly sceptical of its own possibilities of salvation, though desirous of them; but only inclined to attend to these provided they do not demand too high a price or appear too good... And where the positive outbursts of solidarity movements often clash with a deep sense of impotence...

**6.** The foregoing observations seem to us –at the time of making a diagnosis –to give full validity to the words with which Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council, and in which he

alerted against....

insinuations of souls who, despite their ardent zeal, *are not endowed with sufficient discretion and measure*, who do not see in these modern times anything other than prevarication and havoc. Who keep saying that our era has worsened with respect to previous eras, and who behave as if they have nothing to learn from history that still remains the teacher of life... We feel ourselves obliged to dissent from the prophets of doom, who always announce fatal happenings, as though the end of the world was near<sup>3</sup>.

That “discretion and measure”, that serenity free from fear, and that capacity to learn from history, all those qualities the Church is going to need in the new millennium. Perhaps all the above considerations can lead us to accepting serenely the question: What is happening today to the Church? Or better still: Is God asking something of His Church? And in this case: What is He asking?

All Christians should ask themselves this type of questions, without thinking that these could only be the fruit of resentment or the desire of sterile criticism. And praying God that He frees us from that conditioned reflex action of those in power who always react before events in defence of their own institutional interests, and who always see in whatever claim for reform a personal attack. In any case, what happened to Jesus should serve as a lesson to us. Because we are followers of a Man who was denounced and led to an infamous and degrading Cross, precisely by the religious authorities –legitimate at that time– of the people of God, who felt offended by His prophetic declarations and His critical comments about the religious system (cf. Mt 23 and Mark 11,15-18). They made life impossible –for Him, first, and later for His followers– thinking that they were doing a favour to God (cf. John 16,2) and to the people (cf. John 11,48).

7. In the restricted dimensions of this article, it is impossible to deal thoroughly with a problem that is so wide. The best purpose this Booklet could serve could be that in future the problem of the “*ecclesia semper reformanda*” should be perpetually kept in mind<sup>4</sup>, and we should live our faith in the light of that serenity of the Spirit which “renews everything”.

If to somebody the following pages appear as excessive criticism, it may be good to clarify that what moves us to write these lines is no desire to teach lessons to anybody or to impose our private opinions on others. We know too well that if it is a question of “throwing the first stone” we are not without sin (cf. John 8,7). What leads us really could be ascribed to the following two motives: a) the conviction that the mission of the Church is not to create “men of the establishment” but followers of Jesus. And b) the knowledge that we too are simply people who have been forgiven and who can call God our Father and that this is the work of the Spirit of God in us (Rom. 5,5 and 8,3). Pardon is a source of unity, because sin as the underlying common factor makes us all brothers.

And, since we have spoken of the necessity of a “practical credibility”, let us systematise the reflections which follow from the four characteristics of the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic), that we all proclaim in the Credo as the signs of the true Church, and as the fruit of the action of the Spirit of God in her.

## 2. THAT THE CHURCH MAY AGAIN BE ONE

The unity of the Church is, for Jesus, the condition of her credibility: “that all should be one... *in order that the world should believe* (cf. John 17,21).

This can give us an idea of the importance of the ecumenical task that faces the next millennium. The will of God regarding His Church is expressed much more in the command for unity than in the existence of a certain determined structure, however much they would like to cling to it those responsible for the ecclesiastical institution.

In this sense, the ecumenical effort aspires to manifest the “Church of the Trinity” as defined by the Second Vatican Council: “a multitude of people reunited by *the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (LG 4).

This unity is what has been disfigured by divisions. And for this, without the union of the churches, the Christian message, which is their responsibility, cannot avoid appearing inevitably unilateral and, on this account, deformed. The division of the churches should be regarded, according to Vatican Council II, as the greatest fault imputable to believers for the appearance of modern atheism (GS 21).

Yes, indeed, if the churches of the Reform –parting from the question regarding justification– would recover the benevolence of God *the Father* who is at the same time the Origin of everything and the “justifier of the impious” (Supremacy and Mercy), the Catholic Church has been the one that has most conserved the Christological legacy in which *The Word* was made “flesh” of this history, and pitched His tent in it. On account of this, she conserves virtualities that are absolutely necessary for saving the community aspects of the Faith and the structural aspects of sin, together with the primacy of the poor that is Christologically motivated. The Church, however, conserves too the danger of making sacred certain things which in reality are simple institutional. On the other hand, the Churches of the East have conserved better the tradition of the *Spirit* without Whom Grace would become *cheap* and its entry in the world would be converted into “sclerosis”; but this tradition runs the risk of ending up in a sterile *spiritualism*, without the incorporation “of the Father through the Son”: of the loving commitment with this world which is, at one and the same time, creature of God, hostile towards God and forgiven by God.

In this context of divisions, what is admirable is the insistence with which John Paul II has been repeating on various occasions that the Church should know how to ask publicly for forgiveness for her past sins... and her present ones too. This forgiveness should not be limited to the Jews alone. In the two ruptures that the Church has suffered in this millennium that is now drawing to a close (the rupture with the East and the rupture of Luther), the Roman Church has had a high percentage of blame. And this can be said without making a myth of any reformer or being unaware of the arbitrariness and the lack of spirit displayed in the other parties of the conflict.

## Unity in forgiveness

As a matter of fact, the rupture with the East (1054) began in reality more than a century before. Rome, which had just acceded to the political power of the popes, exceeded itself in its role of arbitrator between Fotius and Ignatius (who were disputing the seat of Constantinople), trying to decide more with political interests in mind such as social aspirations over the lands of Iliricus and the dispute with Constantinople for the social jurisdiction over Bulgaria... These power interests warped the arbitration process. It was the layman Baanes who, in the Fourth Council of Constantinople, challenged the papal legates, refusing to sign a text condemning Fotius without a previous hearing of what Fotius had to say. The addition of “filioque” to the Creed is *theologically* legitimate, but it was done on the initiative of the West *without respecting the existing right*, which prohibited the addition of anything to the creed of Nicea and Constantinople. The relations were already poisoned before the rupture.

Something similar occurred with the rupture of Luther. The almost one hundred years that separated the end of the Council of Basilea and the Fifth of Letran (which concluded in 1517, only a year before the outburst of Luther) were marked with repeated negations on the part of the popes to reforms that the entire Church was claiming since the time she had come out of the traumatic Schism of the West. As a historian of the Church said: “Rome prevented the Catholic reform of that time and, a little later, on the contrary, had to face the Protestant reform”<sup>5</sup>.

The ruptures, therefore, were being prepared on account of a policy that was obsessed with the accumulation of power, and characterised by the refusal to attend to the demands of reality.

And we do not recall these facts for the pleasure of re-opening past wounds, but because Vatican II pointed out *the reform of the Church and the conversion of the heart as the first principles of ecumenism* (cf. UR 6 and 7). We do so, therefore, to underline the necessity of mutual forgiveness, and after that, the recognition of difficulties that have of necessity been accumulating over the various centuries of separated and antagonised history.

This helps to understand better a truth that stems too from the ecclesiology of the New Testament: the union of Christians should not be conceived as a uniformity dictated from Rome but a true and efficacious communion within the plurality of diverse traditions: This entails: “it is not necessary in the future to seek a greater ecumenical unity of the Church, taking as the point of departure the model of unity that exists today within the Catholic Church”<sup>6</sup>. Because the Spirit is not only the principle of unity, but also of liberty and of diversity. That is why the churches that have been recorded in the New Testament in order that they may serve as a point of normative (canonical) reference for the entire church that wishes to be faithful to the project of Jesus (that is to say, to the “Kingdom of God”) and thus be able to merit the name of “Christian” as a “denomination of origin”, reflect a very notable and enriching theological and structural pluralism<sup>7</sup>.

*A shared feeling of forgiveness, of mission and of service to the world, which stems from the belief in a Father in common and in a Lord in common and in the Spirit in common, will unite churches more than conversations and theological dialogues* (so necessary on the other hand).

The problem which is thornier in this field –that of the ministry of Peter–, we will deal with when speaking of the apostolic Church. Let us remain at this stage with the idea that as in the case of the Trinity, as we have just said, the unity of the Church does not consist in her uniformity but in the communion of the plural.



### 3. THAT THE CHURCH MAY AGAIN BE CATHOLIC

Already in the first century of Christianity, the New Testament gives testimony of a plurality of churches and ecclesiologies that catches one's attention. In connection with this datum, our attention is drawn on several occasions to the fact that this plurality of the Scriptures is not resolved by granting pride of place to a "cannon within the Cannon", but by having the biblical cannon reside in *the totality* of the New Testament.

#### **Kat-holic**

To go one step further, the word catholicity in its original meaning did not signify a mere geographical totality<sup>8</sup>, but a totality of unified diversities, without renouncing if possible, any of the diversities. Catholic comes from kata-holon: "according to all aspects". It is for this reason that it tries to be integrating, without excluding anything.

It is undeniable that there are things that are incompatible with the truth or with goodness and have to be excluded. But it is also undeniable that there exists a human tendency that conceives diversities as incompatibilities: this tendency will end up by reducing God to the size of the human individual or group, and against this tendency there rises the "catholic" intuition of God.

Catholicism could be translated then as *omni-versalism*, which expresses a sense of unity much more difficult and more perfect than that suggested by the word *uni-versal*, where unity seems to stem from the imposition of one alone. Catholicism is the yearning for this type of impossible unity which does not exclude any partiality and which is affirmed as possible from the viewpoint of the Trinitarian faith in the Spirit of God spread out "over the whole flesh", and from the viewpoint of belief in the Incarnation of God in all our human characteristics (excepting sin). Cat-holic is thus a denomination which one can feel proud of.

So, the tragedy of current Catholicism is that it has come to take on a *merely sociological* denomination, that only designates a particularity among others. Much more: it not only designates a partiality among others but precisely the most closed and the least audacious: the word *Frühkatholizismus* appears in Biblical studies to designate this more authoritarian and more frightened ecclesiology, which is to be found in the pastoral letters of the New Testament (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> to Timothy and Titus).

#### **Insufficient ecclesiology, incomplete Church**

As a matter of fact, the practical ecclesiology of the current Catholic Church is built almost exclusively on *one part* of the New Testament, which are these Pastoral letters. It does not contain anything of the ecclesiology of Paul in his *letters to the Corinthians* (liberty and plurality unified by one only Lord and one only Spirit). Neither does it contain anything of the ecclesiology, which can be sensed from the *Ionic writings* (where fraternity created by the coming of the Son and the equality of all, is almost the only constitutive element of the community). Nor does it contain anything of the ecclesiology of *The Acts of the Apostles* (whose primitive “communism” and whose yearning for the integration of all particularities converted the Church into an alternative community, which appeals for a single existence). Nor again does it contain anything of the New Testament ecclesiology of the local churches (each one of which was already “the” Church and not just a mere “part” of it, so much so that the universal church was not a “sum” of the local churches, but the communion of all of them)...

The official ecclesiology of the Catholic Church today, seems to have renounced all those ingredients and has structured itself exclusively around the Pastoral Letters, together with the universal idea of the letters called deuterpauline (Ephesians and Colossians), and the ardent institutionalising desire of Mathew (without the moderation though of this Evangelist, and reinforcing it with the pagan category of “sacred power” that the Evangelist was quite ignorant of). In this way we are faced with the paradox of the practical ecclesiology of the Catholic Church which is in reality not kat-holic.

To be faithful to the New Testament, our ecclesiology should recover “the church of the poor” of Luke, together with the Pauline church of liberty, and that of discipleship and fraternity, after the pattern lived by the communities of the beloved disciple. This was the dynamics of Vatican II, when it rejected the vertically juridical schemas which had been prepared for it, and began defining the church as “sacrament and sign” of salvation. Or when it abandoned the category of the church “society” to move toward the structuring of the church as “communion”. If we abandon this guiding principle of Vatican II, we will find ourselves in a situation similar to that Paul had to combat in his letter to the Galatians, when those who had been declared unauthorised in the “council of Jerusalem” for wanting to oblige converts into becoming Jews, made their appearance in Galatia preaching against the gospel of Paul.

It should remain quite clear that we are talking here only of “recovering” what is lost: not of abandoning what is already possessed, because then catholicity will again be lacking. The communion of all the local churches in one body of Christ that is “the Plenitude of Him and which is made complete with the whole reality” (Eph. 1,23), will be very necessary in the XXI century and in the era of globalisation. Likewise, the process which goes from the charismatic primitive communities to the institutionalisation of the Pastoral Letters is a permanent lesson against all cheap anomisms and is the fruit both of the force of the real (for its opacity and for its baseness), as also of the change of strategy required by a church which was getting increasingly bigger and which was undergoing persecution and the threat of deviations which disfigured the Christian identity. It should remain clear then that we are talking of recovering what is lacking, without abandoning the positive elements we already possess.

### **Authority yes, but this should be integrating**

*“... The many sufferings ...which are not caused by the Bulgarians but by the central organs*

*of the ecclesiastical administration. This is a form of mortification and humiliation that I did not expect to find and which has deeply hurt me...*

*The difference between my way of seeing situations on location and certain ways of judging the same things in Rome, hurts me very much: this is my only true cross” (John XXIII during the period of apostolic delegate in Bulgaria –1925– and in Istanbul –1944).*

The Church needs authority and institution. But it must be added that it is God's will that this authority and institutionalisation be kept to the minimum possible, and not in maximum doses which appear to give more security, but which make impossible the presence of other more evangelical factors: Christian liberty and the radical evangelical conversion of authority into service. The complaints of a man so exemplary and so faithful as who would later be John XXIII, and which head this chapter, highlights a serious lack of “cat-holicity” in the exercise of authority on the part of Rome.

Borrowing the analogy of the incarnation for laying the foundations of authority, we could say that the Word of God needed “a body” too to make Itself present among us; but with the body not ending up rendering opaque “the Glory of God” but making it translucent (cf. John 1,14). For this reason, defending the authority of the Church signifies at the same time proclaiming the necessity of her transformation, along the lines of the wonderful program Paul imposed on himself when he wrote to the Corinthians (and precisely in a situation of acute problems of authority): “I do not aspire to being the lord of your faith but the companion of that joy in which you are being matured, thanks to the faith” (2 Cor. 2,1).

And all this can be visualised alluding to concrete examples that have taken place recently. This century has drawn to a close with two global synods of the churches of America and Asia. In contrast with the primitive ecumenical councils (in which Rome went to the places where the assemblies were held and had no intention of imposing conclusions taken beforehand; on the contrary, Rome “received” with an interchange of dialogue what was decided in those councils), this time it was the churches of the two continents which had to commute to Rome, perhaps to “defend themselves” from previously redacted texts, alien to their context, and which predetermined the conclusions of both synods. One inevitably compares the decisive universal influence that the primitive councils used to have, with the empty formality of these recent synods.

Another example is offered to us by the recent document “ad tuendam fidem”, which intends that certain questions that in reality are simply disciplinary and not dogmatic in nature (the appointment of bishops, clerical celibacy, priesthood of women...) should be protected with possible excommunication of those who declare themselves against the current views, the argument for this proposal being an unknown classification of doctrines that are not “of faith”, nor “defined” but simply “definitive”. A decision of this type constitutes excessive authoritarianism, which can only be accounted for on grounds of fear, and which cause the Church greater harm than that caused by bad example: the harm of behaving in a ridiculous fashion. It could be said with bitterness, that a document like this does not serve “ad tuendam fidem” but rather “ad struendam fidem.”

There is a form of ecclesiological pragmatism which ends up configuring the Church in accordance with “the wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 1,23) for which the Gospel is simply “stupidity” (1 Cor. 1,23). It is “realism” which considers as utopical all the voices that claim more equality and more democracy in the Church or, to put it in the vocabulary of the New Testament (which is much richer than the word democracy), *more koinonía and more synodality* in the Church: the first refers to the communion in being and the second –more difficult to translate– means “walking together” and alludes to the communion in acting.

This pragmatism considers the descriptions St. Luke makes regarding the church of the poor as “nonsensical”, a result only of the mistaken wait of an imminent end of the world. Many Biblical scholars of the rich world that interpret thus the ideal sketches regarding the Church in the *Acts of the Apostles* need reminding that Luke is precisely the author who had already abandoned the wait for the end of the world. And for this reason, his descriptions have no exclusively apocalyptic value, rather they have a *historical* value, that is to say: they have something of a “sacramental”. Luke sees a sign of Eschatology and of the Resurrection of Jesus in that effort to obtain “that there should be no poor among them” (cf. Acts 4,34) even if that should involve the basis of having goods in common.

It is in this context of eschatological anticipation and of symbolisation of alternatives that we have to situate the whole topic of “democracy in the Church”, about which more will be said when speaking of holiness. Let us say at this point by way of conclusion that these efforts (desperate though they are) aimed at getting the evangelical spirit to soak into including what we may describe as institutional in the Church are in striking contrast with the traits scholars of the New Testament ascribe to “primitive Catholicism (or conservatism)”, alluded to before by us and which are portrayed as follows:

- a) the death of the eschatological yearning or of the anticipation of the Resurrection.
- b) the growing institutionalisation which intends to “bottle up” the Spirit, forgetting that the Spirit blows where it wills and that the aim to have it available is the fruit of the human tendency to cling to security and not of the promise of divine help. Especially if the intention is to dispose of the Spirit “in self defence”;
- c) the reduction of faith to formulas or labels that keep substituting for that dynamism of the believer's attitude that finds its expansion in hope and charity<sup>9</sup>.

All of us –not only those who hold responsible positions in the Church– are obliged to try to be really *kat-holic*, and not to consider ourselves the exclusive depositories of true Christianity. But it was worthwhile enumerating these affirmations of the New Testament because they appear to reflect many characteristics of our ecclesial times.

### **New cultural adaptation**

*But the main task of Catholicity in the third millennium is not only a task directed inwards, but also one directed outwards.* Catholicity should imply in the future not only a more global and less partial ecclesiology, but also above all, an enormous effort of cultural adaptation. As K. Rahner: “the only tuciorism permitted today in the practical life of the Church is the tuciorism of audacity”<sup>10</sup>.

The rupture with what was accidental in Judaism –symbolised by circumcision– was one of the boldest acts of Christianity in its times. However evident it may seem today, it is necessary to enter

into the mentality of those men that had received the rite of circumcision as a sort of “sacrament” considered definitive of their alliance with God, if we understand the vertigo that the renunciation of that sign of identity must have produced among them.

Well: the Church of the third millennium should not impose on peoples of different cultures a species of “western circumcision”. As Paul says, one has to know how to be indebted to all: Jews and Greeks, Romans and Scythians, Asians and Africans... She should make herself “weak among the weak” and “all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9,19ss) instead of wanting to make everybody “Roman”. Because, speaking geographically, the Church of the third millennium will no longer be European. And the centre of future history does not seem to be situated in Europe either.

It has often been said that cultural adaptation does not imply a flat identification but a transforming assumption. The cultural adaptation of Christianity in the Greek world (when Trinitarian and Christological issues of the first centuries were at debate) probably gave rise to the emergence of the concept of “person”, source of the whole issue of human rights and liberties. A concept which the Greeks did not possess and which represents one of the greatest contributions of Christianity to human history, regarded today as almost the common patrimony of humanity as a whole, far beyond its primitive Christian origin of denomination. In its turn, the assumption of Aristotelism by Christianity towards the thirteenth century created a certain harmony between religion and autonomy of the world, which is not found so clearly in other religions of the planet, and is in the centre of all which we qualify today as progress and control or leading of history by man.

But to point out and applaud these cultural adaptation epics does not imply ignorance of the price they have cost and which today claims for replacement. The excessive contamination with Greek philosophy brought about a situation in which slowly Power and not Love was the privileged category when thinking of God. This seed, contrary to the teaching of the New Testament, was what marked later church science and relegated to the private and not public sphere the relation with God structured around love.

In its turn, the “autonomy of created things” converted itself gradually into a forgetfulness of our bearings with the Christological and divine “North” of creation, disfiguring the relation of man with the world in proud and “Faustian” fashion which has ended up leaving man exhausted and threatening seriously our planet.

Cultural adaptation in the Greek world (and later the assumption of Aristotelism) were *necessary* tasks for the Church of the past. Equally necessary today for the church of the future is the liberation of what we have called the “occidental circumcision”.

*The past does not teach us how to renounce those risky tasks, but does instead teach us to carry them out with Christian wisdom, as expressions of the following of Jesus and of the evangelising mission of the Church: making oneself all things for all men is not the result of a “cheap” faith, but a consequence of the mission of winning over all people (1 Cor. 9,22): but not to win them over for themselves but for Christ.*

It is in this context that the allusion that we made before to Asia takes on capital importance.

## Asia as the prime task

Properly speaking, it was in Asia that Christianity was born and where it is now more a stranger and in minority, *though not less alive*. Asian Christianity has known better how to incorporate all the novelty and the gift of the Spirit, which the theology of liberation has supposed. However, as it has done it in a non-western and non-globally Christian context, this has redounded in great religious plurality (and religious wealth).

Liberation and cultural adaptation, or liberation and dialogue are thus blended together in the churches of Asia and find there their natural place. The first (liberation) discovers decisive “universal” contributions in the Christian message, as the commitment of God with the poor of the world and with what Jesus called “the kingdom of God”. The second (culture setting) discovers undeniable limitations in the *explicit* Christian message, which has to be completed in its encounter with all the “seeds of the Word” or with the anonymous forms of “recapitulation in Christ”, that the Spirit has been sowing outside explicit Christianity.

To many ecclesiastical people in responsible positions it would seem that a new Asian (or African) cultural adaptation, similar to the task of old Christianity in the Greek world, would imply infidelity and loss of identity, similar to what the old “proselytisers-to-Judaism” considered was happening in the Pauline churches. However, *it was Paul and not the proselytisers-to-Judaism who saved Christianity for the future*.

*The Church of the third millennium will have to learn this lesson, without forgetting that it should be carried out in a spirit of cordial and open dialogue, and not from a position of solitude or systematic obstruction to all deep cultural adaptation attempts. The tragedies which took place in China (in the case of Mateo Ricci), in India (De Nobili) and in Latin America (the Paraguayan settlements), are much too many and should not be repeated. We can only wish to God that in this historic moment our Church will know better than just condemn Asian theologians, as she did some years ago with the Latin Americans.*

*But this is not exclusively the task of Rome. The whole European church should divest herself of her Europe-centredness and apply many of the ample means at her disposal to the welfare of the future which seems to be taking shape in Asia.*

*Let us add, by way of conclusion, that this attention to what it would seem would generate more future, does not imply forgetfulness or overlooking of other areas that lie nearer to us (as European lack of belief or the immense African drama). Speaking with a Christian perspective, a historical opportunity can never be a privilege; it is on the contrary a bigger responsibility.*

#### 4. THAT THE CHURCH MAY AGAIN BE APOSTOLIC

*The apostolicity of the Church undergoes a serious reductionism when she limits herself to a mere juridical problem of formal succession.* What is more: historically speaking, the hypothesis cannot be excluded that that merely juridical line of succession could have been broken in some of the various schisms which affected the papacy in the Medieval Age. One of these schisms which though not the only one, was indeed one of the most sensational that occurred in the XV century and was called the Schism of the West. Those divisions in the succession of Peter were quite often resolved more by the death of one of the candidates and the abandonment of his followers than by a clarification of which was the true line of succession.

But this observation –apparently so serious– as a matter of fact lacks importance when viewed from the more complete notion of apostolicity. A mere formal apostolicity is not sufficient, as was shown by the old discussion regarding the “heretic pope” who automatically ceased to be pope, however juridically correctly he was nominated. Apostolicity implies –besides juridical succession– a succession in the faith, which includes not only doctrine but also the *following* of Jesus. And not only the following of Jesus, which is no doubt the main thing, but also it must be said that the “successors of the Apostles” must be “followers” of the Apostles.

##### **Apostolate as mission**

The reason of the fore-mentioned lies in the fact that the prime end of the Church is that of being sent, being missionary, being apostolic”: it is significative that in ecclesiastical language, the word “apostolate” connects both with the old Apostles as with that missionary and evangelising task that is the fundamental “raison d’être” of the Church. Both meanings are inseparable. The ecclesial ministry is an apostolic ministry and not one of cult<sup>11</sup>.

It must also be clarified that when talking of mission and evangelisation, none of these two words is equivalent to proselytising. Insofar as the offer of a “good news” which has transformed the life of the apostle is concerned, evangelisation consists in *serviceability, announcement and sacramentality*. The Church evangelises being a servant of the Kingdom and, hence, of humankind. The way of the Church is mankind, and not vice-versa<sup>12</sup>. The Church evangelises being “sacrament of salvation” (LG 1,1), that is to say, a meaningful sign, not just a mere non-significant imposition which supplies its lack of meaning by appealing to divine authority. It is only after the gesture of service, following the teaching of Augustine, that the word is added and the “sacrament” emerges.

Or said in another way: Christians do not profess that the Logos was made “explanation” but that the Logos was made “flesh” and pitched His tent among us (John 1, 14). That is to say, the Christian word is above all a word “of welcome” before it is, and in order that it can be, an “explicative” word. And more so, at the present time, when people are so conscious of the intrinsic ambiguity and insufficiency of all language.

This helps in certain circumstances the Church to achieve her apostolic task through what may be

called “indirect fecundation” (how many values of the Modern Age owe their origin to Christianity, although many are unaware of this!) more effectively than by direct imposition.

### **Apostolicity and ecclesiastic structures**

Herein lies one of the burdens of our Church. Because if what has been said in the previous paragraph is true, it follows logically that *all the structures of the Church are only for its mission and do not stem from an arbitrary caprice of God* that declares that He is more pleased with one type of structure (authoritarian, masculine...) than with any other. Paraphrasing the saying of Jesus regarding the Sabbath, it is necessary to repeat today that the structures are for the mission and not the mission for the structures. This means that what we are looking for above everything else is missionary efficacy and coherence with the announcement of the Church.

For example: it is absolutely false, and probably heretical, to affirm that the Church is monarchical because of the will of Jesus Christ. That the ministry of Peter turned out becoming a monarchy is due to the belief at that time that monarchy was the most perfect forms of government and, for that reason, *it had to be* that which God wanted for His Church. These were the lines of argument of Cardinal Bellarmino. But today this cultural supposition regarding monarchy has been superseded. And to argue in this fashion would be equivalent to suggesting the idea of an arbitrary or ignorant God who does not desire the best for His Church<sup>13</sup>.

In consonance with all this (and speaking now from the strictly historic point of view) it is affirmed today that Jesus only left *the Apostolate* as the ecclesial structure, that is to say, the group of men whose form of life was the mission. And within this apostolate Jesus seems to have also left a collegial configuration, around the ministry of Peter<sup>14</sup>.

It has been written recently that the present structures of our Church more than facilitating actually impede or render inefficient the ecclesial announcement<sup>15</sup>. Why?

Sometimes because these structures seem to contradict the very content of what is announced: it is very difficult to preach that God is Love, and love *in* man (and for this reason, the absolute Foundation of brotherhood) using structures that are primarily authoritarian, clericalistic, over-centralised and that concede sacred preference to differences and verticality rather than to equality for which “in Jesus Christ there exist no differences between man or woman, lord or slave, Jew or Gentile” (Gal. 3,28).

At other times because the understandable necessities of administration proper to an institution with almost a thousand million members, have reduced the evangelising and missionary task to a bureaucratic and administrative one. The mission of the Good Shepherd “who knows all his sheep and is known by them” has become practically impossible. The boldness displayed by the shepherd who dares to “leave the 99 faithful sheep” to go in search of the single lost sheep (cf. Mt. 18,12ss), is practically nonviable these days, although precisely today the proportion between ninety-nine and one are almost inverted. It happens too that if some shepherd, obeying the mandate of the Gospel, were to “go” in search of the strayed sheep, we would have to face the complaints and protest of the “faithful” sheep and would create evident problems to bureaucratic and administrative interests.

For all these reasons, we can say that the historic sin of our Church can be defined as a



*sacralisation of mediations*, that take her back to certain religious mediations of the Old Testament, superseded in the New Testament (see *Mathew* 18 and 23,1-12; *Hebrews*), that obscure the God of Jesus Christ. We would like to underline that this temptation is absolutely understandable: we, men, tend to identify ourselves easily with our mediations, and it is God and fidelity to Him above all else, that alone is able to draw us away painfully from them. The number 12 in the church of the New Testament had a symbolical significance so intense that, according to the book of the Acts, the first thing that the Apostles felt drawn to do after the Resurrection of Jesus was to recompose at one and the same time the symbol of Twelve broken by the disappearance of Judas, and the expression of the character of the Church as the “new people of God”<sup>16</sup>. It was the necessities of the mission (and the freedom of the Spirit that summoned St. Paul from outside the scope foreseen by the institution) that brought about the abandonment of that symbolic number.

### **Recovering the “people of God”**

For the new millennium, which is about to begin, it is decisive that the Church should get back to structuring herself around the lay people. The word “lay” does not signify “profane” in opposition to a “sacred” hierarchy, but simply a member of the *people of God*<sup>17</sup>. Vatican II defined the Church as *the people of God* and not as sacred power. This does not rule out that the necessity of people having their ministries and services, for their own community life as well as for the task that they have got together for. But the designation of those ecclesiastic services with the sacred vocabulary (priesthood, clerics, pope...) is alien to the New Testament.

In its turn, the word “cleric” which in Greek means luck, or portion of inheritance, designated in its origins *the totality of the Church*: they are the “fortunate people”: the people whose luck is God or who constitute the “luck” of God. For this reason they are “the sacerdotal people” (Apoc. 1,6; 1Pe 2,5). Reserving this word solely for the ecclesial ministries constitutes a falling back on conceptions that have been superseded by the happening of Christ, and will end up threatening the true fraternity of the community of believers.

And, nevertheless, those holding responsible positions in the Church are afraid to talk of co-responsibility of lay people, as though this could only mean irresponsibility.

It is shameful that we only remember the responsibility of lay people when it comes to asking them to put a cross in favour of the Church in the Income Tax Statement. But perhaps the crisis of candidates for the ministry will be seen as a warning of the Spirit to the Church for her to try and re-discover a structure that would be more in accord with her Christological and spiritual character.

Finally, in all this task of structural reform, there is a concrete point which deserves particular consideration, given its importance in the New Testament and in the history of the Church: we refer to the configuration of the ministry of Peter.

## **That Peter should return to being Peter**

*We have to overcome the “Gregorian” figure of the Church, that is to say, the form of conceiving the Church as a diocese of universal dimensions, stretched out over the globe. The universal Church exists “in and parting from” the local churches (LG 23). (S.Madrigal, “Sal Terrae”, Oct. 1997, p. 740)*

It is no easy matter to grasp the full importance of Peter in the primitive Church. Besides being the first official witness of the Resurrection, Peter was a decisive factor of unity when the inevitable human divisions arose in the way Christianity should be understood. He blended boldness and the freedom of Paul with the strong desire of fidelity of the Jewish-born Christians gathered around Jacob. He also had the valour to abandon a self-centred Jerusalem, alien to the future, for Rome, centre of the history of the era, where he would finally meet martyrdom. He was no authoritarian leader always praised and exempt from error; rather he was a weak Peter, capable of denying the Lord he madly loved. But that did not hinder the primitive communities from understanding his faith and mediating capacity as the true “rock” on which the Church could rest (cf. Mt. 16,17ss).

In the following of Peter, much more than as his simple “successor”, the church of Rome of the first millennium characterised herself for her notable capacity to arbitrate and mediate, qualities which converted her into a source of unity and centre of ecclesial communion.

The adoption of temporal power by the popes towards the end of the first millennium, together with the falsification of a series of documents (Donation of Constantine, Pseudodecrees...), converted “the sandals of the fisherman” into a “triple crown”, which ended up in a thousand struggles for power and in a falsification of the ministry of Peter. The “servant of the servants of God” turned up being a species of “vice-god” on earth; and even today resound the words written almost a thousand years ago by St. Bernard to pope Eugene III: “you seem to be more the successor of Constantine rather than of Peter”<sup>18</sup>.

It was only when the pope became a political monarch that the thought occurred of having the church converted into a “monarchy”, with the logical resistance of the East. Up to then Rome had been a centre of communion and a criterion of faith and unity, but in no way the supplanter of the local churches with their initiatives and autonomies.

Recent popes have had the valour to acknowledge that Peter has become today the greatest obstacle for unity when his ministry is precisely a ministry of unity. And John Paul II, in a recent document, has asked of all the faithful inspiration and help so that the ministry of Peter, without losing its identity, could once again become a factor of unity and configure itself in a way that the denomination of “servant of the servants of God” would appear a more fitting title<sup>19</sup>. Linked to what was said in Chapter I, when speaking of ecumenism, the affirmation can be made that herein lies one of the greatest evangelical challenges for the church of the third millennium.

There are besides a thousand concrete points which can start activating the response to this challenge. For example:

- Election of the bishop of Rome;
- Renunciation of the title and political character of Head of State, which is at the root of so many sins and errors of the later Church (and which is something different from the existence of the small state of the Vatican);

- Return to the local churches of the power to elect their pastors, in accordance with the practice prevalent in the first millennium and which was defended and legislated upon by numerous popes:
- Suppression of the College of Cardinals and of the profoundly pagan title of “princes of the Church”;
- Possibility of the popes of Rome to resign at an opportune time like any other bishop;
- Full equality (which should be accompanied with profound gratitude) in the treatment the Church gives to women;
- Profound reforms in the Roman Curia and the full restoration of Episcopal Collegiality;
- Suppression of Apostolic Nuncios and of Nunciates, making it possible for those who, in a special way look after the relations of the different Churches with the Bishop of Rome, to become presidents of the different Episcopal conferences.

These among others are the points where the Catholic Church has at stake her fidelity to the Gospel and her credibility before the world inasmuch as it is through them that she will be the model of a faith that does not appear dictated “by flesh and blood” but by “the Father who is in heaven” (cf. Mt. 16,17). Of the above points perhaps the last merits more attention: the Roman Curia should not be converted into a wedge placed in the Apostolic College separating pope and bishops; rather it should be at the service of the College (since it is at the service of the pope who is inseparable from the College). But, some recent documents (as that of the laity) appear to be a reprimand of the Curia to the bishops, as though Ecclesial Collegiality was given only between Pope and Curia, and not between Pope and Episcopal College. This lacks ecclesiological meaning: it would not be an orthodox practice, and is a result of fear and the instinct of conservation.

It is not up to us to spell things out more clearly. We are only a voice in the Church and it is not our intention to supplant other voices. We only aspire to be a faithful voice (and we wish to God it could be profoundly so) to the Lord of all. Not a voice like those that end up imposing themselves by different tactics and correlations with power but rather a voice that wins out on account of the truth that lies in what it says, remembering what Jesus said to the Jewish authorities: “if these should keep quiet, the stones would speak out” (Luke 19,40). We are eagerly looking forward to this recovery of the authentic “apostolicity” of the Church, because we feel that in this characteristic and in the unity of Christians, Christianity has largely at stake its possibilities for the future.

## 5. THAT THE CHURCH MAY AGAIN BE HOLY

“Without the *hybris* of an ecclesiastical hierarchy that wants to plan everything and extinguish the Spirit, this spirit that can be troublesome, that is always new and unpredictable, that is love, that can be tough, that directs men and even the Church to where men have no mind to go, to what is always new and unknown which only when it already exists, manifests itself to be in keeping with the Spirit which is ever old and ever new... The Spirit of God... can never be translated in an adequate way, nor totally placed at the disposal of the Church, through what we call the hierarchy, principles, sacraments and doctrine” (K. Rahner, *Escritos de Teología*, VII, p. 86-87).

Vatican II speaks of the Church as a community of faith, hope and charity, or as a community of the Father, Son and Spirit. Either of these two designations brings us closer to the first articles of the Creed and this will be the matter of the last of our comments: the holiness of the Church.

The last impossible challenge for the Church of the third millennium, is to try to fulfil the words of Jesus: “be holy as your Heavenly Father” (Mt. 5,48) that Luke paraphrases as being “merciful as the Father” (Luke 6,36): because the holiness of God –biblical expression of his Transcendence– does not consist in His Power nor in His Strength but in Love.

It is normal that this claim overwhelms us. Nobody who truly knows our human nature (and even more our *social* nature) can regard the sin of the Church as sufficient reason for breaking up with her. As did K. Rahner, we too should say that, before the sins of the Church, what we should do is *acknowledge* them but not with the purpose of *condemning* the Church, rather with the intention of *loving* her. This is what the three sentences of the German theologian amount to:

— *“If one is a real Christian, if his eye and heart are educated in the implacability of the Gospel, can he –maybe more than others– deny those sins, pretending they are not or minimise them?”*

— *“Perhaps we may find (in the condemnation) a splendid alibi: we have nothing to do with ‘that’ Church. We will be closer to our ideals, but not closer to God.”*

— *“Why do we not show our love for the Church by humbly and silently suffering the shame of her sins?”<sup>20</sup>*

Be merciful as your Heavenly Father! If God is as He revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the mission of the Church has to be in the first place to make God transparent as Jesus did, not to try and “defend Him” and still less, by force. Because whenever men have tried to defend God, they have run the risk of defending only themselves and have ended up killing “in the name of God” those who have been sent by Him (cf. John 16,3). And always when they have tried to take full possession of the Spirit in self-defence, they have ended up by extinguishing and suffocating the Spirit (cf. 1 Thes. 5,19). Only the effort to *make God transparent* has an evangelising effect,

because it constitutes by itself the incredible Good Tidings. This Mercy to be made transparent is embodied in the two last challenges for the Church of the third millennium: the Jesus-dictated and Christological primacy of the poor (cf. Luke 6; Mt. 25, 31xx), and the evangelical conversion of authority into service (cf. Luke 22).

### **Making transparent the God of the poor**

We do not propose to speak much about the first of these two points. Given its great importance, we have already devoted to it an entire Booklet covering all those who during the course of the current year have tried to describe the challenges of the third millennium. We shall very rapidly add a couple of observations:

a) José M<sup>a</sup> Castillo opined in the above-mentioned Booklet that the Church should totally divest herself of the fear of the poor. Vatican II in its final message to the world tried too to say something on this point. Well, let us add now that that fear has often manifested itself in *the use of orthodoxy as a weapon against the poor*. What we want to say is expressed graphically by this historic quote which does not make up a solitary case: in the Third Council of Letran (1179) the Valdenses presented themselves

“to have the approval of the translation into the vernacular of the Scriptures and their aspiration of evangelical radicalism: `to follow naked the naked Christ'. Walter Map who chaired the Council, succeeded in getting the poor condemned by making them fall in error with an authentic theological snare (he asked them if they confessed to the *Mother of Christ* and following their assent to this, he accused them of not recognising the title of *Mother of God* for Mary). This is a sample of the abyss that separated the theological elite from those groups of Christian radicalism.”<sup>21</sup>

This abyss is still present in many sectors of the Church. It has not been the only time that the affirmations of the poor have been used against them, making them deny things they have had no intention really of denying. Expressions such as “church of the poor”, “base communities” or “popular church” have never attempted to deny the other (hierarchical) pole of the church. But there did arise voices that tried to do away with these expressions, accusing them precisely of attempting to do that. As in the first centuries those who intended to highlight Jesus' humanity were accused of denying His divinity or vice-versa.

It is the moment now to affirm that all use of orthodoxy as an argument against the cause of the poor merits the warning of the letter of James: the devils too have orthodoxy and they shiver (James 2,19). This warning was given in the Letter to those who seeing their brothers hungry or naked and –despite their being able to do so– do not procure for them the necessary food or clothing” (cf. James 2, 14-16).

b) In second place, we think it would be magnificent if, at the beginning of the next millennium, the universal Church (and above all the churches of the First World), following the words of John Paul II with which this booklet was opened, examined our silence or connivance with the holocaust of all those condemned in this world. A connivance that has been bigger and less amended for than that which took place in the time of Nazism vis-à-vis the Jewish holocaust. In any case, the statement proffered by D. Bonhoeffer in those circumstances still holds good: The Church will only have the right to intone the Gregorian chant when she has used her voice in favour of the Jews”.

As all gestures can lose their value, it is not particularly important that there be or not be a public petition for forgiveness, a petition that cannot be claimed or imposed by the presumed victim because in that case it would not end in reconciliation but in victory of the latter. What is important is that the words of John Paul II, which headed the present Booklet should penetrate within us: how can one keep silent after so many forms of violence have been perpetrated in the name of faith?”. For this reason, before the jubilee of the third millennium “the Church is very much in need of conversion (metanoia) which is ... the preliminary condition for the reconciliation with God, both of individuals and of communities”<sup>22</sup>.

Each local church should spell out later that conversion, taking into account their particular circumstances. If we may be permitted to suggest a couple of global gestures, we would request, in the first place, that we never forget the teaching of John Paul II reminding us that: “vis-à-vis cases of necessity, preference should not be given to superfluous ornaments of temples and to precious objects of the divine cult; on the contrary, it might be necessary to swap these goods to give bread, drink, clothing and shelter to those who lack these” (SRS 31). Another global gesture, in which all the churches, headed by the church of Rome, should participate in is to join forces with all the efforts that are being made to bring about in the beginning of the new millennium a cancelation of the unjust e(x)ternal debt which has paralysed so many countries of the Third World for so many years.

### **Making transparent the God who renounces His Power**

In what refers to the second point, it must remain quite clear –as we have already said at the beginning– that we do not affirm anything against Church authority nor against its absolute necessity in the Church. We only wish to propose an evangelical conversion in the way of exercising the same. A conversion which John Paul II also alluded to in the closing ceremony of the European Synod of 1991, when he asked for forgiveness “for the false testimonies of those who claiming they are of Christ, have not used their power and authority for the service of peace, justice and liberty”<sup>23</sup>.

Authority is necessary, given human multiplicity and is indispensable for co-existence and collaboration. All anarchical institutions have ended up breaking away from each other. However, the church's authority and power should not be considered in their own right as a phenomenon of God but rather their necessity highlights the renunciation of God to play with special privileges when He enters our history.

But even so, what really makes God transparent is not power but the communion of freedoms. To think the opposite in the case of the Church would be incurring in a sort of “ecclesiological Arianism”. For this reason, the same Gospel that recognises the necessity of authority decidedly recommends its radical transformation into service. And the mandate of Jesus keeps on resounding: “it should not happen among you as among the chiefs of nations” who act authoritatively and then claim praise (cf. Luke 22, 24-26).

The Church has the order of “not adjusting to the figure of this world” (Rom. 12,29 not even with the excuse of being able to combat it better. For this it prays in the Eucharistic prayer asking God “to take her to perfection by the practice of love” and not by the exercise of power. Because, at the very moment the Church adjusts herself to the figure of this world, the world will have defeated her. And we must acknowledge that in this field, it is civil society today that in many places sets the example of evangelical values, in stead of the Church being “the light of the world” (LG 1,1) that

she is called to be.

It is in this context that the claim for the “democratisation of the Church” that we have alluded to before, takes on more force. It is not a question here of “adjusting to the times” but rather obedience to the Gospel. It does not make sense discussing if the Church is or is not, or should be “a democracy”. It should be quite clear that it is only in an analogous fashion that the Church can be compared to civil society. But, as we have said earlier, the terms of “communion” and “synodality”, of a deep ecclesial root, pose even bigger demands than the word democracy. And the Church should feel herself profoundly obliged to seeing to it that those sacred terms do not get devalued and falsified in her as is happening today with the word democracy in current civil societies where economic and public media dictatorships are the order of the day.

Let us say then that if democracy can be characterised by a series of traits as government by the people, control of power, representation, separation of powers and the state of right..., many of these terms can hold good for the Church at least partially, whereas other terms may need discarding. As a matter of fact:

— The Church is not a “government by the people” but by the Word of God; she is, however, *a society of equals*, and as such, the principle pertaining to ecclesiastic tradition and which is today almost of common right: “*what affects all people must be dealt by and approved by all*”.

— The Church is, besides, a “society of Grace”. This goes further than what in democracies is called “the state of right” or “the reign of law”.

— The Church is a community in which the poor have preference by divine right, something our formal democracies are far removed from.

— But as in any civil society where social principles such as subsidiarity and that of separation of powers hold good, the same social principles should also apply to the Church. It sounds scandalous that a Church, who defends those principles in her social doctrine, should consider herself exempt from applying the same to herself.

Let us put forward a sole example of this absurd situation. John Paul II has written that “the organisation of society with three powers (legislative, executive and judicial)... reflects a realistic vision of the social nature of man, (because) it is preferable that one power is balanced by other powers and other spheres of competence that maintain it in its just limits”. The pope contrasts this human wisdom to the conception of those totalitarian regimes which consider that some men... by contact with the most profound sources of collective consciousness, are exempt from error and can therefore assume for themselves the exercise of absolute power”. (CA. 44). Deserving of attention are the arguments brought forward by John Paul II, which derive *from the very social nature of man* (which is not modified by the ecclesial fact). Who can attempt, therefore, to say that these same arguments are not valid for the Church?

The same holds true for the famous “principle of subsidiarity” described by John XXIII as the “the unmoveable principle”, and which is valid not only for relations between individuals and public powers, but also for local communities: “it constitutes a serious breach to take away from smaller or lesser communities what they can achieve and obtain by themselves and to grant this to a higher power” (MM 53).

These principles that are easily encountered in the theology of the New Testament of “the local churches” are especially noted for their absence in the Catholic Church. of our times... In this context it really becomes quite necessary to add a word regarding doctrinal authority

which is an issue that has created more problems in the last two centuries. Three great currents have marked the Church of the twentieth century: modernism, the “nouvelle théologie” and the theology of liberation. With their vacillations and initial inexact approaches, they discovered and recovered three authentic “sources of Christian life”: the religious experience, the character of “Good Tidings” (or Kerygma) of Christianity and the “unsurpassable dignity” of the poor in the Church. Seen from the distance of today, the reaction of authority vis-à-vis the poor appears scandalous as it confines itself to a global condemnation, lack of nuances, and a cruel persecution of their representatives. From these episodes we will have to learn for the coming century. In the Church of Jesus Christ, doctrinal vigilance cannot be carried out “crushing the broken weed” or “extinguishing the smouldering cinder” nor trying “to establish the truth at the expense of charity”, in explicit contradiction to what is suggested by the language of the Scriptures (cf. Is. 42.2; Eph. 4,15).

We can conclude, then, that both the democratisation of procedures, as well as the full equality of women and the exercise of fair criticism are values that the Church must accept in the next millennium, although they will later have to be regulated juridically depending upon the cases and circumstances at issue. But this regulation will have to be effected in a way that tends to safeguard rather than suppress these values. If this regulation unveils and makes transparent effectively the God of the poor and the God “rich in mercy”, the Church will have returned to being *a seedbed of hope* in a world that needs her.



## CONCLUSION

In his discourse to the cardinals on the jubilee of the year 2000, John Paul II expressly said that “a careful look at the history of the second millennium may help us to underline similar errors we could be guilty of”. We think that this look at the past millennium can help us, among other things, avoid making of the Church an idol in our love for her.

In fact: medieval theologians taught that we are not permitted to believe in the Church, and that affirming the contrary would be idolatry, since the Church is a creature of this history. *To believe with the dynamism of faith which saves mankind, one can only believe in God, the Father, Son and Spirit* (“credo in Deum” says the Latin). And, nevertheless, that faith is intrinsically ecclesial (*credo ecclesiam*): from there stems the acceptance of the Church. Although faith is the most profound act of a person, no one can live it individually<sup>24</sup>. By believing in a God who is “Communion” (Father, Son and Spirit), we accept the existence of a Church that is integrating, plural, a follower of Jesus and that unveils and makes the Father transparent (that is to say: One, Catholic, Apostolic and Holy).

In accordance with this, what the Church should not aspire to is for men to believe in her in a way that leaves no place for risk and faith in God. The decisive challenge for the Church is to live profoundly the experience of the Living God, and to help people to have authentic “experiences of God”, that will help them to be believers in a secularised world. The Church should aspire, therefore, to the Spirit working in her and configuring her as a community of believers, so that men can find God the Father, Son and Spirit.

We can say, then, that the Church is One because she is the Church of the Father, sole Origin of everything; that she is Catholic because she is the Church of the Son, the Recapitulator of all that exists; that she is Holy because she is the Church of the Sanctifying Spirit; and she is Apostolic because she is the Church that is in the world and for the world (GS 1,1).

And when we say that the Church should aspire above all to having the Spirit work in her for the service of mankind, we would wish to link this Booklet with that we published at the end of the last year about the Holy Spirit, which was to serve as an introduction to all the Booklets of this year 1999<sup>25</sup>. Christians –it was said there– should not enter the third millennium with the superstitious expectations of esoteric happenings, rather they should pray to the Lord to lead His Church to what John XXIII desired as “a new Pentecost”.

By desiring a new Pentecost for the community of believers, we wish to highlight three traits of Luke's narration of the coming of the Spirit:

1. Luke says that something “like a strong *wind*” was produced (Acts 2,2) because the Spirit is *internal strength* and supposes a victory over fear, in keeping with the words spoken by John XXIII in the opening ceremony of the Council.
2. He adds the image of “*tongues of fire*” (Acts 2,3) which evoke an experience of contact with *something that burns*. The sensation of having touched something burning is a precious description of the believing experience in the Gospel.
3. And, finally, the Spirit produced immediately *the koinonía* the *communion* of all

believers of many places and languages. Each one found himself with the others “in his own language” (Acts 2, 5-8), because the experience of faith does not change the identity of the believer; it only gives it fuller meaning.

We wish our words have emerged from this triple aspiration. Theologically speaking there exists in the Church great liberty for the audacious word, proceeding from the Gospel. But this word does not intend to accuse (who could accuse those who God forgives?); rather it attempts to “idealise”: that is to say, it points out how much distance remains to be covered to be at the level of the Spirit of God. If we do not recognise our defects with the happiness of forgiveness, others will point them out in accusation.

It is from this viewpoint alone that we dare to offer these lines to the entire community of the faithful. Despite the unimaginable burden which St. Paul calls “our flesh” (man's egoistic, sinful and incapable-of-loving inclination) we are all called to keep on working for this new humanity, for this human perfection (cf. Eph. 4,13) in which God recapitulates everything in His Anointed One”, and in which the Risen Christ is given to the Church not that she should keep Him for herself and dispose of Him for her own benefit, but so that she should complete Him in every way (cf. Eph. 1, 10 and 23). The ecclesial institution knows in this way that she is not the centre of the Church and of the communion of believers but the one who serves them: the sole centre of our faith is Christ who with the gift of His Spirit creates faith in the community. Christians should proclaim that the happiness that this shared faith in the church gives, is much bigger than all the deficiencies, which we have been lamenting. We conclude with the prayer of the ecclesial institution:

Let your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, that all people may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.

Keep your Church alert in faith to the signs of the times and eager to accept the challenge of the gospel. Open our hearts to the needs of all humanity, so that sharing their grief and anguish, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and advance together on the way to your kingdom.

(Eucharistic prayer V, b and c.)

## NOTES

1. The first text is taken from the Memory Letter sent to the cardinals in the spring of 1994: *Riflessioni sul Grande Giubileo dell'anno duemila*. The second from an interview given to the Polish journalist Jas Gawronski, quoted by L. Accattoli, *Mea culpa*, Barcelona 1997, p. 11.
2. Captivity of Avignon, the Schism of the West, appearance of dissidents that invoked the Gospel as the reason for their dissidence...
3. Documents of the Council, BAC, p 751.
4. Paul VI requested the Curia Romana, already in 1963, to always be at the vanguard of this approach: “la Curia stessa all'avanguardia di quella riforma, di cui la Chiesa stessa.. ha perpetuo bisogno” (AAS, LV -1963- 793-780).
5. K. Fink, in the *Manual de Historia de la Iglesia*, Barcelona 1973, IV, p. 752.
6. M. Kehl, *La Iglesia*, Salamanca 1996, p. 349. The author is commenting on the words of Cardinal Ratzinger. We have more concrete practical suggestions in the book of K. Rahner and H. Fries, *La unidad de las Iglesias una posibilidad real*, Barcelona 1987.
7. Mentioned this way by a great Catholic specialist who was a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission until shortly before his death in *Nuevo Testamento*: See R.E. Brown, *Las Iglesias que los Apóstoles nos dejaron*, Bilbao 1986.
8. That at that time this situation was not yet to be had and the word used to denote it was *oikouménê*.
9. According to the council of Trent, faith “if not prolonged in hope and charity, does not unite with Christ nor convert believers into members of His body” (DS 1531).
10. *Escritos de Teología VII*, p. 93. Tuciorism is the name given to the option for greater security.
11. Cf. B. Sesboué, *No tengáis miedo*, Santander 1998, pg. 105-107).
12. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 14.
13. About Bellarmino, see the 3rd controversy (De romano pontifice). Opera, Ed. Vives, I, 461 ss.
14. Cf. Mt. 16, 19 words said to Peter, with 18, 18 words said to the disciples.
15. J. Martin Velasco, *Increencia y evangelización*, Santander 198, p. 148 ss.
16. As is well known, the people of God of the Old Testament were structured around the *twelve tribes*.
17. In Greek, “laos” means people.
18. *De consideratione*, book 4, III, 6.
19. See numbers 88-99 of the apostolic letter *Ut omnes unum sint*.

20. *Escritos de Teología*, VI, 310, 309. 308.
21. G. Alberigo (ed.) *Historia de los concilios ecuménicos*, Salamanca 1993, p. 168.
22. Cf. *Il Regno* 39 (1994) 453 and 388. Also *Tertio millennio adveniente*, IV, 32.
23. See the quote in L. Accattoli, op. cit., 157.
24. Cf. J.I. González Faus, *¿Podemos creer en la iglesia?*, in “*Sal Terrae*”, June 1998, 465-473.
25. Cf. J. Vives, *Viento de libertad, fuente de vida*, *Cristianisme i Justícia* n. 83.