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VISION OF THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

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Abstract

The Argentine Pope Francis, the first Jesuit elected Pope, received his intellectual and spiritual training during the time of the 2nd Vatican Council. Deeply influenced by his cultural environment and the critical political situation of his nation he turned to become more and more a strongly pastoral-minded personality. Therefore, his vision of the Church is, first of all, formed by the basic idea of the Council concentrated on the People of God, and, secondly, by his experiences with his own "people", which led to the development of the "Theology of the People." Thus the "people" of God is the subject of the evangelizing Church. The "people" cannot even err in its entirety. Considering the universal Church, she should be decentralized, and collegiality and synodality should be strengthened. The principle of subsidiarity should be applied inside the Church as well as in the society in general. Above all, the Church should follow again the example of Jesus Christ and not behave like a master, but as a servant. As a book-title of the Pope suggests: *The true power is the service*. In a time when so many people are suffering, the Church must be a Good Samaritan Church engaged in the process of healing and helping those

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in distress and need. She must be a Church of the poor, helping them and even learning from them.

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Pope Francis' Image of the Church

In the interview which Pope Francis exchanged with Antonio Spadaro, the editor of the Jesuit periodical *Civiltà Cattolica*, on August 19, 2013, he explained his view of the Church by referring to Vatican Council II,¹

The image of the church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God. This is the definition I often use, and then there is that image from the Second Vatican Council's 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' (No. 12). Belonging to a people has a strong theological value. In the history of salvation, God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships.

Although Pope Francis is the first pope who did not participate in the Council in person, he, nevertheless, is educated and formed by its spirit. Regarding the different images and concepts of the Church, his first point of reference is not the hierarchy of the Church, but the biblical image of the people of God, that is to say, the Church in its entirety.

Actually, the Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (= LG) is the fruit of a long discussion among the Fathers of the Council. Under the influence of modern ecclesiology, the re-evaluation of Holy Scripture and ecumenical thought, not the continuation of Vatican I, the definition of papal infallibility and the role of episcopacy was at the end their first concern, but the Church as such.

So the Constitution started with looking at Christ as *Lumen gentium*, the light of the nations. In view of the person of Christ, his preaching, his life and death, the Church is the universal sacrament, "a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG, 1).² This idea finds its echo in a rich biblical imagery:

¹Quoted from https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html

²The Documents of Vatican Council II are quoted from: Documents of Vatican Council II. Ed. by *James Kroeger, M.M.* Pasay City: Paulines Philippine, 2011.

In the Old Testament the revelation of the Kingdom is often conveyed by means of metaphors. In the same way the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in different images taken either from tending sheep or cultivating the land, from building or even from family life and betrothals, the images receive preparatory shaping in the books of the Prophets (LG, 6).

Accordingly the Church is compared with a sheepfold, “a piece of land to be cultivated, the tillage of God,” the building of God, “that Jerusalem which is above,” called “our mother,” the body of Christ.

By calling attention to the idea of the People of God, Vatican II, in a way, determines a new starting point. It combines the past history of the Old Testament and the memory of the people liberated from slavery and Egyptian domination, roaming through the desert and looking out for their promised land with the peoples of our days searching for their final aim. Amidst all the various peoples and nations emphasis is put on the People of God, that is to say: the People which is called by the Lord.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the Greek term for “people” is not *demos tou theou*, but *laos tou theou*. In a time when the possibility of democracy inside the Church is a topic of discussion, the observation is important. However, on the other hand, the term “laity” and “layperson” is derived from the Greek *laos*. That, again, is not to be neglected, when the position of the single member of the Church is determined.

As we can see: all of us belonging to the Church are, first of all, members of the *laos tou theou*, correctly understood: “laypeople,” before endowed with certain functions and gifts on behalf of the Church community. This is well expressed in the saying of St Augustine: “For you I am the bishop, with you I am a Christian” (Serm. 349, 1 = PL 38. 1481)

Subject of the Church

In European countries, for a long time, laypeople as ordinary members of the Church were rather objects of Church administration and pastoral care. Since, for e.g., in Germany members of the Churches pay their church taxes, they expect that the Church renders various services in administering the sacraments, taking care of people in need, sick, old and poor, and fulfilling other services. However, the

³For more details, see Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005 (4th edition), 506-509; *Sein Name ist Franziskus. Der Papst der Armen*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014, 75-78, 123f.

invitation to get personally involved in active participation sounds rather strange. At the same time, on the other hand, many people in modern society dislike to be compared with sheep which are led by shepherds and have to follow their command silently.

Pope Francis strongly insists that the people of God is subject of the Church. In the above mentioned interview he states:

The people itself constitutes a subject. And the church is the people of God on the journey through history, with joys and sorrows. Thinking with the church, therefore, is my way of being a part of this people. And all the faithful, considered as a whole, are infallible in matters of belief, and the people display this *infallibilitas in credendo*, this infallibility in believing, through a supernatural sense of the faith of all the people walking together. This is what I understand today as the 'thinking with the church' of which St Ignatius speaks. When the dialogue among the people and the bishops and the pope goes down this road and is genuine, then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit. So this thinking with the church does not concern theologians only.

All this is for Pope Francis not only a point of theory, but it is proved in practical life. Even if people, including the members of the hierarchical order, bishops and priests, often find themselves unused to it, they are encouraged to utter frankly their opinion. The best example in recent time is the fact that in preparing for the Episcopal Synods dealing with marriage and family life, a worldwide investigation campaign took place in order to find out what people think about these questions, how marriage and family life is accomplished, how sexuality is practiced, how people comply with ecclesial doctrines, what they are missing on the side of the Church, etc. The result of the inquiry was that in many ways a dissension between the official Church teaching and the practice of the faithful became obvious. How the Church will cope with the problem, we shall see when the Ordinary Synod will close. The expectation is great.

Anyway, free speech in the Church is demanded today, and all of us are witnesses of a new process of learning. For a long time the Church used to be considered as *Mater et magistra* (1961, Pope John XXIII). In the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (= GS), 44 we are taught,

For thus the ability to express Christ's message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people. To promote such exchange, especially in our days, the Church requires the special help of those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers. With the help of the Holy Spirit, it

is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage (GS, 44).

The Church herself is put into the position of learning and being assisted by the "world". "Dialogue," which nowadays is one of the well used fundamental terms inside the Church, consists basically in an exchange where both sides listen and speak, where it comes to an exchange of opinions in respect for each other and both sides are eager to deepen their understanding and their commitment for the good of the people.

"Infallibility of the People of God"

There is a very challenging proposition which we come across again and again in Pope Francis' announcements. He used to mention it already in his time as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. We quoted it from the interview given to Antonio Spadaro, which we find in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (= EG) also, as to be seen below: "The entire Church cannot err, she is infallible in believing." This is hardly heard in sermons and even in classes of theology, although it is taught in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 12:³

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.

Again in *Evangelii gaudium*, 119:⁴

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it

³For more details, see Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005 (4th edition), 506-509; *Sein Name ist Franziskus. Der Papst der Armen*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014, 75-78, 123f.

⁴*Evangelii gaudium* is quoted from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith — *sensus fidei* — which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.

There are two remarks to be added:

- ***Infallibility in general:*** When Vatican I had defined the papal infallibility, unfortunately the Council had to be stopped and left unfinished since the war between Germany and France forced the bishops to leave Rome and to return home. Thus the relationship between papacy and episcopacy which was on the agenda, could not be treated anymore. Actually, Vatican II inserted some remarks on the infallibility of the bishops in LG, 25. Since, however, the Council did not deal with the infallibility as such, the different remarks were scattered and are to be found where the various agents of the Church, the entire people and the bishops, are talked about. However, it hardly can be denied that the various accents given to the doctrine imply consequences for the infallibility of the Pope itself. Pope Francis clarifies his own position by saying:

I do not believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization' (EG, 16).

As Pope Francis emphasized that he was chosen as bishop of Rome, he repeatedly demonstrates his will to exercise his office in collegiality and his wish to strengthen the collegial and synodal elements which are more developed in other churches, especially among the Orthodox Churches. Francis even talks about a "conversion of the papacy" and deplores that attempts of the former popes in this direction were not very successful:

Since I am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about a conversion of the papacy. It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization. Pope John Paul II asked for help in finding 'a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new

situation'. We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position 'to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit'. Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach (EG, 32).

● **Infallibility of the people:** In the quotation from EG, 119 there is an instance which calls for special attention: "infallible, this means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith." Here we have to realize that in Pope Francis' thought also the experience of his own people stands behind the image of the People of God. He has lived with the poor at the margin of human society. Liberation theology in Argentine differs from other forms of liberation theologies, let us say, in Cuba or Brazil. It is a liberation theology which found its expression in the theology of the people, grounded in popular piety and devotion rather than in social analysis which called for social and political action.

Popular piety, however, was not the result of theological reflection; on the contrary, it produced theological reflection. The piety of the poor people and even the illiterate makes them subjects of the faith. This is well illustrated by the following examples which Pope Francis narrates:

To understand this reality we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love. Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor. I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a rosary; or of all the hope poured into a candle lighted in a humble home with a prayer for help from Mary, or in the gaze of tender love directed to Christ crucified. No one who loves God's holy people will view these actions as the expression of a purely human search for the divine. They are the manifestation of a theological life nourished by the working of the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5) (EG, 132).

Here we are confronted with the vivid faith of people who express their faith not with words, but with deeds. In their life witness we come across their faith. Faith is testified not so much with words, but in wordless life which awakes faith in other people who have eyes to see and ears to hear. The same is applied to the virtues of hope and

love, as they can be verified in the instances mentioned. They testify a deep faith without words.

Features of the Church to Come

The few hints we gained by looking at the concrete reality of the people of God, as it is transmitted to us by Pope Francis, enable us to collect some features of the Church to come. By learning from people who are marginalized in human society the image of the Church is changing. Nothing but this stands behind the Pope's emphatic call for attention to the "Church of the poor." He wishes to build the Church from below, from and with the ordinary people.

- ***In an ambivalent and changing world:*** May be what the Pope is saying, is easier understood in the so called new or young churches than in the traditional western churches which for centuries have developed structures and ways of organization which are about to break down and fall apart in our days. Some reasons for it have nothing to do with the Church herself. They have to be seen in technological developments which affect human life, first in the highly developed countries, later on also in other parts of the world.

One of the revolutionary changes is the result of the many inventions in the field of mass communication. Thus in the last decades we experience an overflow of information by the ever more refined media of worldwide communication which at the same time deepens the process of interchange between all parts of the world. For my country, for e.g., I can say that the TV-corner at home with the daily news has replaced the pulpits of the Churches in the neighbourhood. The daily "gospel" is pronounced by the daily news broadcasting and reaches us from all over the world. In his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (no. 37c) Pope John Paul II already spoke about the newly established Areopagus in the world. Pope Francis reminds us of the tremendous differences which humans are experiencing in their life: in some parts of the world most of the people are concerned with their personal security, social peace, luxurious life and leisure, in other parts of the world, war, fear and distress, hunger and lack of food for the little ones is on the daily agenda with little hope for change and escape. Recently the Pope even spoke about a Third World War whose witnesses we have actually become, since violent attacks by terrorists have taken place even European cities, creating fear and anxiety in people.

In fact, our daily life is rather ambivalent. That is true also in another sense. On the one hand, we are living in a pluralistic and global world which seems to have very much in common and gets more and more uniformed. On the other hand, we still are influenced by our local and regional culture, its way of thinking and doing. At least in our daily life we share the common language, which to a large extent still shapes our thought. That leads to the point that we live — as we say in German — in many “*Ungleichzeitigkeiten*,” “non-simultaneousness.” E.g. some inventions do not reach all parts of the world at the same time; they are not even accepted among ourselves. Thus in my native country some old folks simply despise the mobile phone or the internet communication, and consciously they exclude themselves from certain ways of communication.

By all these “non-simultaneous” processes the Church is affected, too. It influences her way of self-realization, also the promulgation of faith. In Germany a heavy decline and lack of religious knowledge, consequently a diminishing interest in the Church in general cannot be denied. However, what has to be affirmed for one region of the world, cannot be necessarily be presumed for other regions as well. We still have to distinguish between global and local situations, global and local evolutions. I even dare to say that, notwithstanding whatever they all have in common, in some sense the Church also is not totally the same in Rome and in Paris, in Bangalore and in Tokyo, in Nairobi and in Buenos Aires.⁵

This we should have in mind while looking for the possible future built-up of the Church. Here again it might be helpful to pay attention to some suggestions given by Pope Francis. It is regrettable that so many people, even outside the Church and among non-believers are fascinated by the Pope and expect so much from his pontificate, whereas apparently many insiders, even in leading positions, either do not understand the intentions of the Pope or contradict him silently or openly.

● **Decentralized Church:** In view of the plurality of human society which involves many segments of life, also cultures and religions or *weltanschauung*, it is meaningful that not all problems are carried to Rome to be solved in the centre of the Church. Therefore, Pope Francis invites the local bishops as well as the bishops’ conferences to

⁵For an attempt to analyze the modern human situation see my Dharmaram Lectures: Hans Waldenfels, *In-Between: Essays in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2011.

be aware of their own responsibility and, if possible, to solve problems of local importance by themselves.

This implies the application of the principle of subsidiarity inside the Church. In her social teaching the Church repeatedly insisted on this principle while teaching the general public and society. However, when it comes to similar situations inside the Church, the principle is rather neglected.

This applies to the relation between local Churches and Rome as well as to decisions and governing inside the local Churches, too. In Germany the average age of the clergy is increasing and the expectation regarding priestly vocations is rather low. Most of the bishops try to solve the problem by abolishing small parishes and creating new structural entities. The close contact between faithful and clergy is getting lost. Pastoral care suffers, whereas administrative duties increase. The papal view of parish work is not discussed. Pope Francis writes:

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be 'the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters'. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented (EG, 28).

In fact, it is the urgent wish of the Pope that the Church is near to the people and that she is a point of identity. Therefore, he calls for an open Church — open in different ways:

The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are

other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself 'the door': baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems (EG, 47).

Actually, "decentralization of the Church" implies one more thing which needs to be mentioned. In his short pre-conclave speech the Argentine Cardinal strongly insisted that "the Church must come out of herself and go to the peripheries, not only in a geographic sense, but also the existential, manifested in the mystery of sin, pain, injustice and ignorance." In other words, the Church must not be a "self-referential Church," which looks to herself in a sort of "theological narcissism," which separates her from the world and "keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not allow Him to go out."

As a consequence of this, there are two images of the Church: one is the "evangelizing Church that comes out of herself" and another is "the worldly Church that lives in herself, of herself, for herself." And this twofold consideration must "give light to the possible changes and reforms that must be made in the Church."⁶

● **Service instead of Power:** In 2007 Cardinal Bergoglio published a book titled *El verdadero poder es el servicio* (*The True Power is the Service*). Looking at the example of Christ he again and again reminds the Church, first of all the bishops, to follow the vestiges of Christ. We know Christ's words: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). And again:

Do you realize what I have done to you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master', and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you: no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it (Jn 13:12-17).

⁶Quoted from <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/havana-prelate-shares-notes-from-cardinal-bergoglio-s-pre-conclave-speech>; for the full text see in German, Hans Waldenfels, *Sein Name* (see note 3), 29f.

It is the way Popes Francis addresses the bishops describing their office as good shepherds:

The bishop must always foster this missionary communion in his diocesan Church, following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul (cf. *Acts* 4:32). To do so, he will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths. In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, he will have to encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law, and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear. Yet the principal aim of these participatory processes should not be ecclesiastical organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone (EG, 31).

Actually, the actors of the Church's services are not only the representatives, but all members of the Church are called to fulfil their duty according to the gift God has given them. In his Letter to the Corinthians ch. 12 St Paul uses the human body as a metaphor and applies it to the Church being the body of Christ. As in the body various organs collaborate for the good of the entire body, so in the body of Christ, too, various spiritual gifts, also called charisms, granted by the Holy Spirit, cooperate for the benefit of the whole body:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another variety of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of them, distributing them individually, to each person as he wishes (1 Cor 12: 4-11).

Evidently it is high time that we recall the doctrine of the spiritual gifts which are distributed by the Spirit of God throughout the Church. It is the only way that the people of God becomes aware of its obligation to work as active subject of the Church. By restoring the fullness of spiritual gifts the subjects of the hierarchical order, too, will come to know again that they are called to service, not to might and power.

Pope Francis compares the Church with a “field hospital.” In the interview with Antonio Spadaro he pointed out:

I see clearly, that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds... And you have to start from the ground up.

And he continued:

The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all. The confessor, for example, is always in danger of being either too much of a rigorist or too lax. Neither is merciful, because neither of them really takes responsibility for the person. The rigorist washes his hands so that he leaves it to the commandment. The loose minister washes his hands by simply saying, ‘This is not a sin’ or something like that. In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds.

No wonder that Pope Francis discovers the woundedness and illness even in the Roman curia. It was shocking when in his Christmas speech 2014 to the officials of the Curia he enumerated 15 diseases he had realized among them.

In his various deliberations and admonitions the Pope does not depict an ideal Church; he rather shows his concern with the Church’s reality, for only the Church as she actually exists, is able to meet the world in its distress, in poverty and ignorance, hatred and enmity. Only a Church which acknowledges her own faults, shortcomings and sins and asks God’s forgiveness, is enabled to bear witness to God’s reconciliation and peace, justice and mercy.

The Pope’s Dream

Pope Francis has a dream for the Church to be realized in our days:

I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire

to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: 'All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion' (EG, 27).

The final word while pondering about the future of the Church, cannot be the Church. It is rather the question: "What can we do?" The answer is simply, "Be a messenger of Christ by living and promulgating the Gospel!"

Sometimes I get envious when I see how anxious people in other countries are to learn and to spread the word of God. I recall an evening mass in Hong Kong, maybe 200 people were gathering. The main celebrant welcomed the crowd and left for the confessional. A young lady came to the front. The texts of the liturgy were projected on a screen hanging over the altar. The lady explained the texts, made the community read the texts with loud voice, thus taking care that they got engaged and familiar with the texts. The priest returned to the altar in due time, the screen was removed, and the celebration of the mass began. In his sermon the priest summarized what was elaborated before and the word of God was telling the congregation for the daily life. When Holy Communion was distributed, there were four persons, men and women, two taking care of the consecrated Hosts, two of the Chalice. The invitation, "Take this all of you, and drink from it!" was literally fulfilled. The Eucharist was an event of active participation of all people present — different from what is still done in many traditional mass celebrations in European countries.

Encountering the Eucharist in India we become aware of the fact that Latin liturgy is not the only way of celebrating the central mystery of our faith. I always feel pity with the many Indian sisters who in Germany in their daily mass have to desist from having celebrated it in their native rite. It must be a special feast full of joy when once in a while they gather with an Indian priest in order to celebrate the Eucharist in their rite. Most of the people in our country, including the clergy, do not pay any attention to this act of renunciation.

Anyway, wherever we live as Christian faithful, all of us have to try to deepen the union with Jesus Christ, in order to bear witness in deeds and in words. Only when we engage ourselves in the concrete work of salvation by making the Church a Good Samaritan Church, she will be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (cf. Mt 5:13-16) also in the future to come.

There is one more image Pope 'Francis often uses when he invites the faithful to be the Church in the world living with all creatures God the Creator has called to life:

Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: 'Give them something to eat' (*Mk 6:37*) (EG, 49).