

CHAPTER VIII

**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN
LATE MODERNITY:
ANALYSES AND PERSPECTIVES FROM A
WESTERN POINT OF VIEW¹**

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Christ Jesus, “though He was by nature God...emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave,” (Phil 2:6) and “being rich, became poor” (2 Cor 8:9) for our sakes. Thus, the Church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice. Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart,” (Lk 4:18) “to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 8)

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 centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.

[...]

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). (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49)

¹ Rainer Bucher’s original German text was translated into English by Ms. Rebecca Pohl and ms. Michelle Rochard, and was supervised by the editors of this volume.

THE NEW SITUATION OF RELIGION(S)

Regarding the relationship between religion and societies of the West, we currently have three explanatory models available: the slightly outdated secularization theory, the individualization theory, and the idea of a ‘post-secular’ society introduced by Jürgen Habermas in 2001. All these models can point to empirical evidence in support of their claims.

Secularization theory² claims that the processes of social modernization eventually have a negative impact on the stability and vitality of religious communities, practices, and convictions. There is a fair amount of evidence to support this, especially if ‘secularization’ is taken to mean, somewhat narrowly, the shift of religious content and validity claims to the private realm and the neutralization of religion in the public sphere.

From this perspective, Western societies really are structurally secular. The historical core of Europe’s process of secularization is the high death-toll of the religious wars of early modernity, which resulted in many societal sectors (state, economy, science, etc.) gradually developing a logic of self-perception and action, which was more independent of religion. Even more importantly, these sectors succeeded in asserting this logic over religious institutions.

Apart from a few exceptions,³ European societies are certainly not secularized, if ‘secularization’ is taken to mean the *general* neutralization of religious content, its wholesale disappearance, or the general loss of

² Cf. e.g. Detleff Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Authoritative today: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). The term ‘secularization’ originated as an observational term with rather negative connotations, describing the loss of influence on the part of religious institutions. To the Churches, the term expresses what they actually experienced in modernity. This somewhat denunciatory use of the concept ‘secularization’ has, however, a historical ground. The transfer of Church property into worldly ownership, as in the notorious ‘Final Recess of the Imperial Deputation’ in 1803, was called *secularization*. ‘*Secularism*’, on the other hand, means a combative attitude against any religion, be it in the socio-political field – e.g., the variants of *laicism* – or in the cognitive-ideological field – e.g., the Anglo-Saxon neo-atheists.

³ Several areas of religious desertification constitute significant exceptions to the relative stability of religious practices and attitudes, e.g., large parts of the former GDR or of the Baltics and the Czech Republic. However, parts of France and the Netherlands meanwhile also appear to be affected by this diagnosis. Cf. José Casanova, “Die religiöse Lage in Europa,” *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2007), pp. 322-357, specifically pp. 352-357.

plausibility among the populace. The relevant data show⁴ that the Christian Churches, and, increasingly, also other religious communities, remain important sources of orientation for individual lives as well as for existential questions, although – admittedly – the situational precondition for this is the logic of individual freedom. In other words: everybody has the ‘secular option’ (Hans Joas). The central level of dispute over religion in European societies, then, does not take place at the level of the structural secularization of ‘secularized’ and differentiated sectors of society, nor at the level of the logic of the freedom of religion of individuals. Rather, the conflicts over religion mostly take place in the cultural sphere of values, norms, and the social realities ‘between’ these two levels.

The individualization theory, which has been prominent in the sociology of religion at least since the Swiss study ‘Jede(r) ein Sonderfall’ (‘Everyone a Special Case’) (1993),⁵ assumes that what is taking place “is not a loss of religion” – as the Churches like to perceive the ongoing development – but rather “a restructuring of the religious system and a change in religious forms of expression”⁶ obviously “along the lines of the I.” According to this interpretation, religion does not disappear in modernity, but is transformed into an individual project, which is reconfigured for each phase of life.

There is ample evidence for this theory, too. After all, the biographies of choice, forced upon us by our present time, produce a high demand for strategies that cope with contingency. Those who *can* make many decisions, *must* make them, risk a lot, and must be held accountable for their decisions. In the eyes of individualized persons, life in Western societies is threatened by collapse. The individualization of religion is not the consequence of egocentric pride, as it is sometimes stated within the Church, but rather the immediate consequence of a social situation in which biography increasingly becomes the final place where the disparate parts of society are tied together.

The third explanatory model is the theory of the ‘post-secular’, prominently advocated by Jürgen Habermas in his acceptance speech at

⁴ Regina Polak (ed.), *Zukunft, Werte, Europa. Die Europäische Wertestudie. 1990–2010. Österreich im Vergleich* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau, 2011); Hans Joas and Karl Wiegandt, “Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen,” *Religionsmonitor 2008* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008).

⁵ Alfred Dubach and Roland J. Campiche (eds.), *Jede(r) ein Sonderfall? Religion in der Schweiz. Ergebnisse einer Repräsentativbefragung* (Zurich: NZN Buchverlag, 1993).

⁶ M. Krüggeler and P. Voll, “Strukturelle Individualisierung – ein Leitfaden durchs Labyrinth der Empirie,” Dubach and Campiche (eds.), *Jede(r) ein Sonderfall?*, p. 43.

the ceremony of the conferral of the Peace Prize in 2001.⁷ Habermas articulates the late modern awareness of Western, religiously ‘unmusical’ intellectual elites that religion offers ‘resources’, not only for individual life choices, but also for the legitimation and stability of constitutional democracy. These resources are not easily available without religion, or, in other words, religious language cannot be translated into non-religious language without loss.

At the same time, amidst the ongoing transition towards globalization, Western societies are confronted with *public religions*.⁸ This creates a new and novel visibility of religion in the public sphere. Modern Western societies are globalized in terms of economics, the media, and mobility. They have disempowered Christianity as the dominant social and individual power, and, at the same time, they support active religious freedom. Given these parameters, these societies cannot turn a blind eye to public expressions and practices of religion. On the one hand, this irritates those who like to see themselves as part of a culturally Christian society. On the other hand, this requires a high demand for religious-political regulation.

Without doubt, all three models, as attempts to grasp the situation of religion(s) in Western societies, describe real phenomena. Despite their focus on divergent issues, the three approaches seem fundamentally compatible. After all, the key characteristic of the whole religious field in Western societies lies in the fact that religion(s), in times of global and hegemonic capitalism, is (are) becoming constituted along the same lines

⁷ In his acceptance speech of the Peace Prize of the German Bookshops in October 2001, Jürgen Habermas used the phrase ‘post-secular society’ as a central category in his diagnosis of our time. The term has resonated widely and persistently. Habermas’s diagnosis contains prognostic as well as normative elements. He expects that religious tradition and practices will continue to exist even in ‘secularized’ societies, and he sees a lot of positive elements in this development in so far as religious traditions make valuable (and, in a certain sense, irreplaceable) resources available for a liberal polity. Though Habermas states that the dialogue between religion(s) and modern science and the democratic state has to remain situated on the basis of secular reason, he regards defining the precise boundary line between secular reason and religious language as a *shared* task of both sides, and requires from the secular side ‘a sensitivity to the strength of the articulation of religious languages’. (*Glauben und Wissen. Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), p. 22). See also Rudolf Langthaler and Herta Nagl-Docekal (eds.), *Glauben und Wissen. Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas* (Wien: Oldenburg, 2007).

⁸ Cf. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1994); José Casanova, “Public religions revisited,” *Bestandsaufnahmen zu Sozialethik und Religionssoziologie* (Paderborn-Munich: Schöningh, 2008), pp. 313-338.

as an increasing number of other areas of life, namely, according to the patterns and rules of the market.

Hence, religion is not only individualized from the side of demand – everyone can and actually does build his or her own personal religion – but also from the side of production. Many of its characteristics migrate to other cultural fields, e.g., to the media, economic forms, or a new (trivial-)aestheticizing art-religion, involving museums and pop culture events. Hans-Joachim Höhn's 'theory of religious dispersion' demonstrates the extent to which the "post-secular re-constitution of the religious implies a many-sided transformation process, which includes the conditions of the mediation of religious traditions, social forms, and public presence of lived religions, as well as the use of semantic and aesthetic forms of expression outside religious contexts."⁹

Consequently, the theory of secularization holds the undeniable truth that nobody has to enter into a specific market and that, actually, many – and this varies from country to country¹⁰ – do not even enter the religious market at all. While the theory of secularization articulates freedom *from* the market, the theory of individualization articulates freedom *in* the market. Even those who enter the religious market keep their freedom – as customers. They keep it diachronically because they can change providers; they maintain it synchronically because they can combine elements from different providers, just like in ordinary markets. They also keep the freedom of changing intensity; this, too, corresponds with normal customer behavior. Finally, the theory of the 'post-secular' holds that the religious market *still exists*, that it offers a 'product' *sui generis*, that it is – in relative not in absolute terms – a stable market, and one to reckon with, albeit to different degrees of intensity throughout Europe.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

For the Catholic Church, all this means that it has to come to terms with manifest experiences of undeniable decline in Western societies, above all, in those regions where, for a long time, the Church not only sought proximity but also possessed power. In the end, it means that religion today is constituted less in an *ecclesiastic dispositif*, according to which religion was organized through concepts such as membership, following,

⁹ Hans-Joachim Höhn, *Postsäkular. Gesellschaft im Umbruch – Religion im Wandel* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), p. 10.

¹⁰ See the pertinent country comparisons in Joas and Wiegand, *Säkularisierung und Weltreligionen*, and Bertelsmann-Stiftung, *Religionsmonitor 2008*.

and power, and which also assumed that individual religiosity and collective religion, the most personal and the most public, the most intimate and the ecclesiastic authority were in alignment. In the wake of the global assertion of a liberal, capitalist society, religious practices are surrendered to the individual's freedom and thus follow suit of many other practices that previously also did not belong to the individual's freedom of choice, e.g., the choice of location, clothing, profession, or life partners.

Ever since Late Antiquity, the Christian Church in Western and Central Europe dominated discourses of knowledge, of social order, and of individual practices. Little by little – albeit never entirely, and to differing degrees, and in different shapes in different European regions – it succeeded in enforcing this dominance.

'Modernity' refers to the time in which a counter-movement against the dominance of the sole Christian Church originated. While the alternative Christianities of Wycliffe or the Hussites could still be fought off through warfare, the Protestant Reformation(s) established successful, competing Christian Churches. For the Catholic Church, this was the beginning of a whole cascade of losses of influence, which it experienced as humiliating: its disempowerment by the modern, liberal state in the bourgeois revolutions, the rise of competing political religions, such as Communism and National Socialism, the modern individualization of the religious sphere in the twentieth century.

In reaction to this cascade of losses of influence, the Catholic Church developed, in theory and in practice (where it could enforce it), a compensatory strategy of self-revaluation. Since Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), and as a reaction to the Reformation, the Catholic Church defined itself as a 'societas perfecta': it regarded itself on a par with the early modern absolutist states. Internally, though, this meant a decisive concentration of ecclesiastic power. This strategy reached its apogee in the nineteenth century, at a time when the young European nation states, following the bourgeois revolutions, established themselves independently of religion and when the alliance between the Church and absolutism, valid even during the Catholic Enlightenment, was dissolved. The Catholic Church, as 'societas perfecta', considered itself analogous to the state: a self-sufficient entity, which wanted either to dominate the state ('Catholic state') or to be left free from the encroachments of a 'liberal state', to which it nonetheless made a number of demands. In both cases, the Church deemed itself superior to the state.

The theorem of the 'societas perfecta' articulates, in theological language, what can, in socio-historical terms, be described as the modern drive to organize. This became virulent precisely at the moment when the Church had to reconfigure itself in the wake of the Reformation, as well as during the early nineteenth century when it had to re-organize itself following the loss of its feudal institutional basis. The Pisan era, the period

of the Catholic Church from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, can hence be seen as the pinnacle of Church-internal pastoral power.¹¹ Following the collapse of the Catholic milieu in the 1960s, and following the liberation of Catholics resulting in religious self-determination, i.e., from the time the structural secularization of bourgeois societies reached the cultural reality of Catholics, the Church's pastoral power plunged into its final crisis.

The strategy of defensive institutional assertiveness corresponded with an ecclesiology that excluded others from the frame of salvation. The Catholic Church considered its own state of salvation, and, especially, the reference to Jesus Christ as the central mediator of salvation, to be its own exclusive characteristic, not as a universal concept. Admittedly, the doctrine of God's mysterious ways of salvation was never fully abrogated if only because of all those who lingered 'in insurmountable ignorance of the true religion'. But, in the face of Protestant, Enlightened, and atheist competition, the early Christian 'extra ecclesiam salus non est', which had been officially endorsed at the Council of Florence, was interpreted in an increasingly exclusivist manner and implemented as such in ecclesiastic mentality and practice.

This strategy of inclusion through exclusion implied both the exclusion of others from the salvation economy as well as the internal consolidation of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. This strategy was quite successful for a long time. But it works less well once the power relations between the individual and the religious institutions, also in the Catholic world, are fundamentally reversed, and once the Catholic Church has to build community on a situational instead of on a

¹¹ On this concept: Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, 4 (1982), pp. 777-795; also: Michel Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 223-254. According to Foucault, through its pastoral power, Christianity developed an entirely new mode of exercising power. Christian pastoral power has a number of characteristics that are distinct from previous modes of power. In contrast to monarchical power, which lets others die on its behalf, it is *selfless*. In contrast to judicial power, which is interested in cases rather than individuals, it is *individualizing*. It is *totalizing* in contrast to the exercise of power in antiquity, which was interested only in specific but not in comprehensive obedience up to and including the most intimate aspects of life. The new ecclesiastic pastoral power, then, refers to *everything* in life and *all* of life. Its core image is the shepherd, who must be prepared to risk his life for his sheep, has to keep every single sheep in sight and hence follows those that have lost their way, and is interested in every single aspect of every sheep. The confessional box is hence at least as important to pastoral power as the altar.

normative foundation.¹² This internal power shift within the Catholic Church is far more significant than the question of whether it is a majority or a minority church. Catholic fundamentalism is not directed towards the restitution of a Catholic majority church, but towards the restitution of clerical power within the Church.¹³

For ecclesiastic Catholic pastoral power, the present day represents the definitive endpoint of a long road of decline, which moved from cosmos to community, and finally, to the body. Christianity's cosmically coded power of interpretation was first questioned by people such as Galileo, Copernicus, and Kepler. The Church's hold of the (non-ecclesiastic) community was lost in bourgeois society, i.e., in the nineteenth century, after absolutism had already freed itself from Church dominance in the eighteenth century. In a final stroke, though, the Catholic Church still attempted to exert power over the body – its practices and techniques – in particular through its moral teaching.

However, according to the available data provided by sociology of religion, the *enlightened dispositif of the religious*,¹⁴ which sought the consistency of religious practice and content in the face of reason, and judged religion by this consistency, is no longer prevalent either. Instead, an *'autological dispositif'* has become dominant in the organization and practice of individual religion in accordance with individual biographical needs, which are by no means arbitrary or trivial.¹⁵ This follows a logic of coping with life's uncertainty, among other things, with the help of religion. Religion and also the Church are thus submitted to individual

¹² Cf. Rainer Bucher, *Wenn nichts bleibt, wie es war. Zur prekären Zukunft der katholischen Kirche*, 2. edn. (Würzburg: Echter, 2012), pp. 15–41.

¹³ Cf. Rainer Bucher, *An neuen Orten. Studien zu den Konstitutionsproblemen der deutschen und österreichischen katholischen Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2014), pp. 473–480.

¹⁴ According to Foucault, a *dispositif* is a “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid.” The *dispositif* is furthermore the “system of relations that can be established between these elements,” and hence a “formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*.” (Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1980), pp. 194f.). Cf. Andrea Bührmann and Werner Schneider, *Vom Diskurs zum Dispositiv* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008).

¹⁵ Cf. Christoph Bochinger, Martin Engelbrecht and Winfried Gebhardt, *Die unsichtbare Religion in der sichtbaren Religion. Formen religiöser Orientierung in der religiösen Gegenwartskultur* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009). The authors refer to the self-empowerment of religious subjects. See also: Paul Zulehner, *Verbuntung. Kirchen im weltanschaulichen Pluralismus* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2011).

calculations of advantage. This is now also the case among practicing Catholics.

This means that ecclesiastic institutions are constantly subject to their members' approval. Hence, it is not illogical that the so-called Sinus-Milieu-Analysis¹⁶ – pastorally speaking, the most important empirical study in the German-speaking world of recent times – was conducted by a market research institute, Sociovision, and that it delivered what is to be expected from a market research company: a report on the precarious state of the market.

Many in the Catholic Church find it difficult to accept that they are now subject to the notoriously fickle behavior of their own members. In addition, throughout its long history, Christianity has had rather few experiences with market conditions. The Catholic Church's collective memory is dominated more by power than by market expertise. After all, since the Constantinian turn of the fourth century, Christianity has been accustomed to constituting itself through processes of power.

Seen from a theological perspective, the new situation threatens the Catholic Church with a fatal reversal. On the one hand, the pluralist and relativist processes, triggered by markets, cause unmistakable problems within the Church. Many Church leaders are openly irritated by the loss of sovereignty, by the fact that markets bring about freedom. On the other hand, there is the danger of accepting what is most problematic about markets: their self-referentiality, which posits market success as the final criterion. A number of all-too-enthusiastic reactions to the Catholic Church's partial media success in the past few years support this supposition.

Certainly, it is not possible to overcome the current situation by only taking refuge in well-established, though worn, discursive or social

¹⁶ Medien-Dienstleistung GmbH (ed.), *Milieuhandbuch "Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen"* (Munich-Heidelberg: MDG, 2005). An updated study exists: Medien-Dienstleistung GmbH (ed.), *MDG-Milieuhandbuch 2013. Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen in den Sinus-Milieus* (Munich-Heidelberg: MDG, 2013). An alternative update can be found in Carsten Wippermann, *Milieus in Bewegung. Werte, Sinn, Religion und Ästhetik in Deutschland. Das Gesellschaftsmodell der DELTA-Milieus als Grundlage für die soziale, politische, kirchliche und kommerzielle Arbeit* (Würzburg: Echter, 2011). After initial scepticism, many German-language dioceses went in for this analytical instrument. Concepts for pastoral implementation can be found, e.g.: Matthias Sellmann and Caroline Wolanski (eds.), *Milieusensible Pastoral. Praxiserfahrungen aus kirchlichen Organisationen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2013); Michael Ebertz and Bernhard Wunder (eds.), *Vom Sehen zum Handeln in der pastoralen Arbeit* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009); Michael Ebertz and Hans-Georg Hunstig (eds.), *Hinaus ins Weite. Gehversuche einer milieusensiblen Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).

singularities and by excluding relationships that still need to be tried out.¹⁷ An insecure culture may look at such an exotic counter program with fascination for some time, but then it will be infested by what has been implicitly present in the structure all along: its posture of superiority over and its reticence towards reality, including church realities.

All these processes mirror the fact that the Catholic Church may continue to be a subject capable of acting, but it is also subject to its time. It is not just a strong actor, but also *sujet*, and it can no longer shield itself from the loci where it is present. These loci are no longer simply context for the Church. They inscribe themselves in the Church; they pervade it, shape it, and define it.

THE KENOTIC TURN OF VATICAN II

From the People's Church to the 'Church of the People'

Thanks to Vatican II, the Catholic Church definitely has a viable program in order to deal with the new situation. This program breaks with the exclusivism of the Catholic Church and initiates an inclusive path that is characterized by openness towards spiritual, intellectual, and political challenges. This path is openly attacked by the revisionist interpretation of Vatican II, and is squandered by liberal interpretations.¹⁸

Vatican II undertakes a true change of place and of principle towards a kenotic approach.¹⁹ The Church moves from a position of unreachable and untouchable sovereignty to a position in which it only focuses on salvation, a position which accepts no limitations to solidarity. This kenotic structure of solidarity with humanity as a whole, and the oppressed and suffering in particular, becomes the foundation for building the Church in the Council's constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

From the perspective of sociology of religion, it is also true for the Catholic Church that, given that the place of religion in society is currently

¹⁷ Pope Francis, by contrast, pursues a strategy of forced relativization: his relation of the truth content of the Christian tradition to specific and representative places of late modern existence in globalized times is *situational*: e.g., Lampedusa, homes for delinquent adolescents with migrant backgrounds, the World Economic Forum in Davos, which he addresses in the name of the 'excluded'.

¹⁸ Cf. Rainer Bucher, "Die Optionen des Konzils im Rezeptionsprozess der deutschen katholischen Kirche," *Diakonia. Der Dienst der Kirche in der Welt* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2013), pp. 79-99.

¹⁹ On this term, and its consequence for ecclesiastic practice, see the extensive study by Ansgar Kreuzer, *Kenopraxis. Eine handlungstheoretische Erschließung der Kenosis-Christologie* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2011).

determined by the market, it is nearing its end as a ‘people’s Church’, interpreted as a Church that is self-evident and self-evidently supporting the social order in Western societies. Yet, based on the people-of-God-ecclesiology of Vatican II and its kenotic turn, the Catholic Church has to hold on to the option of being a ‘Church of the people’. The reason for this stance is that, according to the two constitutions on the Church from the last Council, the really existing Catholic Church is ‘God’s people’, called by God and united in Christ.²⁰ It is the community of all those who believe in this universal call, without limitations.

Hence, there can be no fundamental end of the ‘Church of the people’, no retreat into a self-sufficient and self-referential minority. God’s universal saving will, and the ensuing commitment of the institutional Church to indissoluble solidarity with all people, forces the Church to develop social forms that realize this fundamental proximity to the people.

The concept of the people in ‘the people of God’ proposed by Vatican II transcends God’s ecclesiastic people and, of course, also any ‘ethnic/national’ people.²¹ The concept refers to all people and all peoples. All are called upon to belong to God’s people, to receive God’s grace, and to substantiate this themselves. The message of the God of Jesus is true for his entire people, so for all humanity. God wants, as expressed, for instance, in 1 Tim 2:4, “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” According to the Church’s doctrine, the community of God’s people, in its visible constitution as the Catholic Church, is the sign and the instrument of all humans universally being called to salvation.

According to *Lumen Gentium* 13, not only are “all men [...] called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God,” they also “belong,” albeit “in various ways” to this catholic unity of the people of God or “are related to it”: for instance, and in the first place, “all who believe in Christ,” but eventually also “the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation.” The Council sees the Church as God’s people gathered in Christ on its way to God. Everyone in the Church shares the common basis of this one task or mission: to be God’s people.

²⁰ Cf. Elmar Klinger, “Die Kirche in *Lumen gentium* – das messianische Volk Gottes,” *Diakonia* 44 (2013), pp. 310-313; Elmar Klinger, “Das Volk Gottes auf dem II. Vatikanum. Die Revolution in der Kirche,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 7 (1992), pp. 305-319.

²¹ Cf. Ottmar Fuchs, “Suche nach authentischen Erfahrungen. Volksbegehren zwischen völkischer Ideologie und volksbezogener Authentizität,” “*Wir sind Kirche*”. *Das Kirchen-Volksbegehren in der Diskussion* (Freiburg/Br.: Herder, 1995), pp. 101-110; Rainer Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology. A Study in Political Religion* (London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), pp. 112-121.

The Church has to be a place of liberation and the experience of grace, here and now; yet, at the same time, it must refer to the immeasurable horizon of God's grace and love. It is God who calls his people among all peoples. The Church has to respond to this call, not dominate it. If it really hears and follows this call, the Church becomes God's people among humanity. Whether it is indeed responding to God's call can be determined – by discerning whether it is the sign and instrument of God's love.

All this, in turn, requires that the sacramental signaling²² by God's instituted people is effectively filled with life. This enlivenment regards both the orientation of the Church's actions and its social forms. Constituted by the Gospel and its mandate, the institutional Church has to stand up for all God's people in accordance with God's saving will: it has to welcome them all. The institutional Church is obliged to all, especially to those who are not part of its institution. For them, in particular, the Church has to be a sacrament, an effective sign of grace.

The wish for like-minded people in a preferably homogenous community, although understandable from a socio-psychological perspective in times of a declining Church community, by no means represents a more vital Church, or one more faithful to the Gospel. When, from the perspective of Church development and Church action, socio-psychological needs and patterns prevail over theological and Gospel-aligned criteria, and when those groups who fulfil these needs declare themselves to constitute the true and better Church, then, although understandable, this poses a theological problem: it cannot be assumed that these socio-psychological behavioral patterns match those set out by the Gospel. On the contrary, if we heed the Bible's stories, we must assume the opposite. The Catholic Church in the West is thus confronted with the epochal task of realizing itself as a Church of the people in a post-traditional mode, beyond any social self-evidence, as a minority, yet for all.

The Pastoral Constitution of the Church: the End of Superiority

Constituting a Church of the people in a post-traditional mode really represents an epochal turn in the history of the Catholic Church. The Church has to come to terms with the new level of freedom among its own

²² Cf. Roman Siebenrock, "Universales Sakrament des Heils. Zur Grundlegung des kirchlichen Handelns nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil in der Vermittlung von ‚Kirche nach innen‘ und ‚Kirche nach außen‘," *Wahrnehmungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), pp. 59-79; Günther Wassilowsky, *Universales Heilssakrament Kirche. Karl Rahners Beitrag zur Ekklesiologie des II. Vatikanums* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2001).

members. It also means that the social encoding of its message, as well as the aesthetic and cognitive encoding of the tradition, are no longer self-evidently effective and, hence, can no longer simply be continued. They no longer work as basic concepts, as frames and patterns for pastoral care. This marks a task of vast proportions: to mold the incarnation of the original Christian impulse in new forms, aesthetics, and discourses.

Whether the starting point of this task has even been reached depends on how the Church's actors at the different levels react to the irreversible experiences of the decline of ecclesiastic institutions. The temptation to follow the typical modern model is strong because its logic of exclusion corresponds with both the Church's own post-Tridentine tradition and with what late modernity holds out to religion: strategies of exculturation and regionalization.

The great, yet by no means fully fathomed, spiritual achievement of Vatican II was precisely to have overcome the path of exculturation that both modern society and its own tradition presented to the Church. This course was set in three crucial ways: Vatican II's de-clericalized conception of the pastorate transcending the Church's social boundaries,²³ its task-oriented 'signs of the times' concept,²⁴ and its inclusive People-of-God-Theology. All three ground-breaking conceptions were squandered after the Council: the conception of pastorate was squandered in canonical and day-to-day re-clericalization processes, the 'signs of the times' concept was squandered by a culturally pessimistic re-interpretation, and the People-of-God-Theology was squandered through its replacement by a harmonistic and/or a hierarchically interpreted *Communio-ecclesiology*.

The Pastoral Constitution of the Church is neither harmless nor self-evident. It represents the process of risky self-divesting into the dangerous realm of history, into the specific, into the political, and, hence, into all the bewildering and confusing human processes which fundamentally elude any sovereign mastery. The typically modern idea of sovereignty, which had defined the Catholic Church's ecclesiology since Vatican I,²⁵

²³ Cf. Rainer Bucher, "Nur ein Pastoralkonzil? Zum Eigenwert des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Herder-Korrespondenz Spezial* ("Konzil im Konflikt. 50 Jahre Zweites Vatikanum") 2 (2012), pp. 9-13.

²⁴ Cf. Peter Hünemann (ed.), *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2006).

²⁵ Cf. Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, *Unfehlbarkeit und Souveränität. Die päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit im System der ultramontanen Ekklesiologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1975). As is well known, Carl Schmitt historically and systematically characterized all the trenchant terms of modern state theory in reverse as secularized theological terms. Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) (1922).

is thus transcended towards a politics of humility, of self-exposure, of proving itself to be the sign and the instrument of salvation. In *Gaudium et Spes*, humanity's complex history is explicitly identified as the genuine place of the Church. The Church is no longer seen as an entity that transcends history; neither does it merely lose itself in history. Rather, the Church shows its presence in history, or it is not present at all. The way in which it realizes this presence, though, becomes visible in its ministry, so in its acting and its actions. The Church thereby enters not only the risky zones of a confusing and complex world and history, but it is also taking the risk of failing to live up to its own standard. Above all, though, the Church renders itself accountable and puts itself at the mercy of those to whom it promises salvation and redemption.

Beyond Institutionalism, Exclusivism, and Extrinsicism

The conciliar path of non-exclusion is not only truly new in comparison with the modern Catholic Church; it is also a daring path. Inside and outside – always relative of course – now become, topologically speaking, fluid. They face the risk of unprotected encounters. Where inside and outside are no longer separated by real or social walls, where they are mutually exposed to each other, where they venture into the other of one's self, they enter into inevitable contrast. They meet, do not avoid each other, and have to find some common ground. This, however, introduces a space that ecclesiastic social formations, through their internal power structures, had hitherto excluded as much as possible. This space was only known from the much narrower field of missionary work: the possibility of visible failure.

The priority of God's saving will, which is independent of any church, this inclusive matrix that does not allow God's saving will to be confined within church walls, constitutes the grammar of Vatican II. Its central ecclesiastic category is 'the People of God'. It opposes the model of the Church in which its identity is constituted through numerous exclusivist procedures, and in which, moreover, the only ideas that are trusted are those that the modern period had already trusted: institutionalism, i.e., law, domination, and visibility.

Vatican II's kenotic turn is thus realized in three ways: in an anti-institutional way through the insight that the Church is not an end in itself but the servant of a message, in an anti-exclusivist way through the understanding that the Church, as the People of God, is part of humanity and so is 'bound up' in it,²⁶ and in an anti-fideistic way through the awareness that the message is subject to the necessity, but also to the possibility of a pragmatic verification of faith in the here and now.

²⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 3.

These three kinds of awareness represent core stipulations of Vatican II. In *Lumen Gentium* 1, the sacramental – so simultaneously symbolic and serving – character of the Church is put forward.²⁷ The Church is defined as the People of God to which all are called and related in specific ways.²⁸ Building on the concept of Revelation in *Gaudium et Spes*, it establishes the perichoretic relation between dogma and ministry, i.e., between language and action.²⁹

In this context, the venture of self-exposure to the present means opening oneself up to the possibility of discovering one's own message from the perspective of the present, to acquire the possibility of dogmatic discovery. The kenotic structure of the relation to the Church is therefore the foundation for the theological content of a practical theology that must be realized today.

The rejection of all self-sufficient and self-referential identity models offers specific *methodological opportunities* for the reflection on and conception of ecclesiastic action. The anti-institutional insight that the Church is not an end in itself but the servant of a message, leads to the conclusion that the Church's conceptual thinking about its actions must, by necessity and on the basis of its own message, also be self-critical.³⁰ The anti-exclusivist understanding that the Church as the People of God is part of humanity and 'bound up' in it, implies, for the conception of and reflection on the Church's actions, that really *all phenomena* of human existence have to be included. They cannot be rejected as mere 'context' of what is regarded as essential. These phenomena are real 'signs of the times' and hence have to be seen, in light of Jesus's Kingdom-of-God-

²⁷ "Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* 1). On the concept of the sacrament in *Lumen Gentium*, as well as its genesis: Wassilowsky, *Universales Heilssakrament Kirche*, specifically pp. 325-348.

²⁸ "Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God" (*Lumen Gentium* 16). As is well known, the first main part of *Gaudium et Spes* goes by the title 'The Church and Man's Calling', where in *Gaudium et Spes* 11 is written: "For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human." – Cf. Elmar Klinger, "Der Glaube des Konzils. Ein dogmatischer Fortschritt," *Glaube im Prozeß. Christsein nach dem II. Vatikanum* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1984), pp. 615-626, p. 615.

²⁹ "This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them." (*Dei Verbum* 2)

³⁰ Cf. Rainer Bucher, *Theologie im Risiko der Gegenwart. Studien zur kenotischen Existenz der Pastoraltheologie zwischen Universität, Kirche und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009).

Message, as the subject matter of the Church's conceptual discourse. The anti-extrincisist awareness, finally, that this message, like all truth, is bound to verify itself pragmatically in the here and now and can only achieve presence and prove its truthfulness through this verification, means that the reflection on and conception of ecclesiastic action cannot avoid having to put the fundamental concepts of faith at risk.

From its situational perspective, the Church's pastoral actions will not be able to avoid the risk of exposure.³¹ From the perspective of tradition, it will not be able to avoid a wholly new and deepened dogmatic re-minding, if 'dogmatic' means developing answers *from* faith to respond to questions *to* faith. Dogmas are "answers to man's inquiries into God, which pose themselves in scripture and tradition, but also in life experience."³² Both movements, though, coincide in the indefensible event.

CHURCH: THE RISK OF PRAGMATIC VERIFICATION

In our times, i.e., at the end of the Constantinian era,³³ when the Church has lost all sanctioning power over its own members, the course for the future of the Catholic Church will be decided by its decision to follow either the socio-technological path of Trent, or the spiritual-kenotic path of Vatican II, i.e., exclusion and internal consolidation versus dedication as witness to the love of God.

The path of Vatican II points to the orientation towards pastoral tasks instead of to the classic orientation towards social order and social forms. This path means realizing through deeds that the Church does not lose itself in the 'outside' of its institutional forms, but that it can only truly find itself there, where its legitimating task expects it to be. Finally, it means that the Church should make clear, in its way of operating as much as in its own structural constitution, that its essential organizing principle is not super- or subordination, but, rather, the contribution to the Church's overall pastoral mission.

The resistance to this is enormous. The remaining active faithful in the Church react defensively to all change, and the plans put forth by the 'mid-level' do not spark a magic of change. Take, for instance, the

³¹ Cf. Birgit Hoyer, *Seelsorge auf dem Land. Räume verletzbarer Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), specifically pp. 64-74; see also: Rainer Bucher, *Theologie im Risiko der Gegenwart*, pp. 203-212.

³² Rainer Bucher and Elmar Klinger, "Mich hat an der Theologie immer das Extreme interessiert". *Elmar Klinger interviewed by Rainer Bucher* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), p. 91.

³³ Cf. Roman Siebenrock, "Vom langen Schatten Konstantins," *Nach der Macht. Zur Lage der katholischen Kirche in Österreich* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2014), pp. 75-97.

unchallenged keyword in pastoral theology of the last few decades, 'living parish'. This suggests that the vitality of the institution, not the vitality of the human or of the Gospel, is of primary concern. Moreover, this indicates that the parish is apparently threatened by infirmity, otherwise it would not be necessary to constantly proclaim its vitality.

Choosing task-orientation as the constitutive rule of the Church would mean allowing the daily experienced risk of the present to penetrate into the center of pastoral realities and concepts, knowing that pastoral care can no longer be successful if it avoids this risk. In his recent *habilitation* dissertation, Michael Schüßler persuasively argues that in postmodernity, in which time gets a completely new structure, Christian practice no longer derives its identity from an overall and encompassing Christian historical narrative. Instead, Christian practice derives its identity solely from Jesus as role model, whose actions were, indeed, situational responses to what seemed necessary from the perspective of the other.³⁴ Hope, in this scenario, is less a category of salvation in the future than a category of the present, the moment of opening up in the event. "Herewith, the inculturation of the Gospel in its modern, solid state drifts out into the open sea: [...] Not the dialectic of continuity and disruption, but the event, each next step on uncertain terrain, becomes the new locus for the inculturation of the Gospel."³⁵

According to Schüßler, Jesus's 'Kingdom of God'-message refers to an event that does not want to serve as the foundation of a static and 'eternal' order, nor as the promise of an as-yet outstanding redemptive order at the 'end of time'. Rather, Jesus's concept of God represents a dynamic that is much more in the present. Schüßler argues that Jesus's parables of the Kingdom of God open up a horizon of salutary reversals and of real, often un hoped-for, new beginnings. The Kingdom of God is, in the first place, an event: the event of un hoped-for and unexpected liberation and of given, specific salvation. It is the event that happens when and where God reigns. In Luke 17:20-21 it is written: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Jesus announces and realizes the transition to the Kingdom of God as a singular but effective event, rightful under wrong conditions.

³⁴ Cf. Michael Schüßler, *Mit Gott neu beginnen. Die Zeitdimension von Theologie und Kirche in ereignisbasierter Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013).

³⁵ Michael Schüßler, "Auf dem Sprung in die Gegenwart. 'Unsere Hoffnung' als Inspiration für das Zeugnis vom Gott Jesu in unserer Zeit," *Pastoraltheologische Informationen* 31 (2011), pp. 53-80, p. 70 (<http://miami.uni-muenster.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-6122/05.Schuessler.pdf>, 1.11.2011).

But this means: God's Kingdom is the unexpected event of a new beginning without any certainty of its outcome. It cannot be brought about – we have to let it take place. If this is the case, then, in his revelation through Jesus, God opens up a perspective for us, how we can live amidst the tensions and the paradoxes of human existence. Only by risking the event can the victims get the space to turn their silence into testimony. God, then, is the event of justice that we can only surmise. From the perspective of Jesus's practice, being Christian in our times truly demands from us that we do our utmost in showing solidarity with the lived hopes and existential abysses of the present.

The question today, then, is how Christians can give testimony to the Gospel in these risky, fluid times. Just as God's Kingdom cannot simply be erected in the here and now, nobody in the here and now can be absolutely certain to live, in their speech or in their deeds, in true discipleship to Jesus. Christian testimony is precisely not concerned with commanding the truth of a religious power.

At a time when the power of religion is, apparently, once again easily exploited for the purposes of heteronomy and violence, this recalcitrant, paradoxical structure of Christian testimony gets a humanizing quality. Its central call is reversal, the responsive event of a true new beginning. It is a gift, unannounced and unavailable.

An event-based theology and pastoral care model is conscious that the pastoral realization of the Gospel here and now is our unavoidable responsibility before God. It cannot be given up for a glorified past or a pending future. The Gospel addresses a radically situational demand. Pastoral action consists precisely of exposing oneself to the radical demands of a situation, which presents itself in the face of the other.

Loyalty to the Lord Jesus is not tied to a particular social form. It is created anew with each event. In theological terms, this means that we are constantly entangled in the ambivalence of Creation, and that we cannot escape it by moving 'forwards' or 'backwards'. According to Schüßler, Christian faith does not secure a grand religious historical pattern, be it in the form of conservative theologies of history, or in a progressive mode as exemplified by Johann Baptist Metz. Rather, God's grace liberates us to expose ourselves with each event into the present.

It is the central task of the Church to discern the Gospel here and now from the perspective of the concrete human being and so to liberate his/her life here and now from the perspective of the Gospel. Indeed, the Gospel cannot be realized without those to whom God reveals his love. Rather, the meaning of the Gospel has to be clarified from the perspective of human beings, otherwise they will experience no revelation at all. If, according to the Council, pastoral care means a creative confrontation in specific situations between the Gospel and individual human beings, then, in our times, that means embarking into the uncertain zones of possible

failure, and, moreover, embarking into the uncertain zones of one's own faith.

Christian pastoral care is thus a locus for God's manifestation into the hands of all those who relate to him. It is a place where the defenseless God is at the mercy of his people's demands. Pastoral care is concerned with God's presence among people in the risky processes of human actions, done in his name. Yes: theologically speaking, God is the seeker; he is seeking for the human being and all faith is standing in risk of the response to God's seeking. Hence, the Church can only be a Church of seekers, not only from a theological perspective – in as much as faith is not a property to be owned but a gift of grace – but also in actual fact. The Church is God's people, pilgriming people on their way to God, a Church that – alongside others – believes that “the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed” (GS 3), irrespective of their attitude towards the Church.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL SHAPE TO BE TAKEN BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LATE MODERNITY

New and Old Places

The consequences of these analyses and options for the prospective development of ecclesiastic social forms are manifold, comprehensive, and sometimes even revolutionary. Already now, the Church-internal structures of communication and of power are quite new. The renewal will certainly intensify in the future. The Catholic Church will have to give up what has constituted its very structure in modernity: the categories of 'manageability', 'continuity', and the 'claim to exclusivity'. Indeed, comprehensive biographical power, lifelong allegiance, and exclusive membership were the characteristics of the social forms of the Catholic Church.

'Manageability' is a typically modern form of disciplining, which modernity brought to dubious social perfection, and postmodernity brought to successful technological perfection. The ability to oversee everything is a goal that has long been unachievable but, in modernity, it is becoming increasingly achievable for power. The Council of Trent (1546-1563) organized pastoral care in such a way that “‘shepherd and flock’ (priest and parish)” were “brought together in manageable ways.”³⁶

³⁶ Petro Müller, *Eine kompakte Theologie der Gemeinde* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), p. 96.

In his role as ‘milieu manager’,³⁷ the priest has been, for many centuries, responsible for the control and maintenance, for the ‘guardianship and surveillance’ of the shrinking Catholic territory. ‘Manageability’, now seen from the viewpoint of pastoral care, remained a central category in community theology, which was dominant until very recently. The background against which this theology arose was not least to counteract the unmanageable phenomena of modern urbanization processes, namely, by establishing condensed social forms beneath the parish level. ‘Continuity’, though, and the claim to exclusivity were consequences of the ‘*Extra ecclesiam salus non est*’.

However, in religion, we have already been living for a long time in a world of irreversible unmanageability, in a time of religious self-determination. Proximity is now coupled with anonymity and transience rather than with continuity and constant observation, or even permanent existence under the eye of the other. It is not necessary to clearly oversee one’s own position in order to be recognizable, accessible, or approachable. Taking an all-controlling, central perspective might even preclude the possibility of being approached and of being asked.

Recognizability, accessibility, and approachability are the necessary categories for the Church, which, as is rightly demanded, remains present on site, exposes itself, and offers itself up. The assumption of pastoral competence has to be communicated and has to be recognizable and accessible. The reorientation towards hospitality, spontaneity, and anonymity, and with these the renunciation of the principles of control and continuity, is not easy. Rather, it is very demanding. It could, however, mark the emergence of a prospective social formation of the Church – and it characterizes what is new in the loci of pastoral care.

A Fundamental Transformation of Ecclesiastic Pastoral Power

The reorientation means that ‘ecclesiastic inside’ and ‘social outside’ are no longer separated at the new places of pastoral care. They can no longer be clearly identified through opposition, but are exacting each other, being exposed to and confronted with each other. As a result, a rather new constellation will be established: one that, on the one hand, corresponds with the Vatican II’s conception of pastoral care, and one that, on the other hand, radically reshapes processes of Church building.

³⁷ Cf. Olaf Blaschke, “Die Kolonialisierung der Laienwelt. Priester als Milieumanager und die Kanäle klerikaler Kuratel,” *Religion im Kaiserreich. Milieus – Mentalitäten – Krisen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), pp. 93-135.

Traditions are now no longer part of a more or less self-evident 'inside'. Rather, they are subject to individual approval and, even more importantly, to the rediscovery of an 'outside' that no longer adheres to former Christian self-evidence and that is conscious of the numerous new life patterns and existential problems that exist alongside the old ones. For the future ecclesiastic social forms, daring to engage in the confusing and insurmountably complex processes in which the pastoral actors are living in will be imperative.

Ecclesiastic pastoral power, which was very innovative in Antiquity, has, in modernity, increasingly been taken over by the state and the (human) sciences. According to Michel Foucault, this power has been momentous for the development of modern 'subjectivity' as a discursive technique. Ecclesiastic power has three fundamental properties: it is individualizing in so far as it refers to the individual, it is totalizing in so far as it refers to everything about the individual, and it claims to be selfless in so far as it is dedicated to the individual's redemption and salvation. The image of the shepherd covers all three components.

It now becomes apparent that future ecclesiastic social forms will have to be characterized by the shift from the dedication and the selflessness previously demanded from the individual priestly 'shepherd', which, in turn, was linked to his estate ethics, to the structure of the pastoral event.

This also fundamentally changes the other two characteristics, 'individualization' and 'totality'. They certainly remain valid: the new pastoral loci, too, are, in principle, interested in each individual and in everything about each individual. But these two characteristics lose the ambivalent horizon of 'disciplining and surveying', which they had in the classic pastoral power and the agrarian shepherd metaphor. From demands made of others – everyone has to yield everything in the context of Church religion – they become demands made of the Church. They turn into the task of not avoiding anybody or any of their problems. From impositions made by the Church on to its members, they become impositions of the people on to the Church.

En Route to a New Social Formation of the Church

All future social forms of the Church will have to assume that the Church is no longer – and never will be again – the master over the motives of its members to participate. This is not only true of those 'new' places where this is obvious and already conceptual reality, but also of all those traditional ecclesiastic social forms where the tempting fiction of a self-evident Church and Christianity continues to be passed on.

In order to cope with this situation, the Catholic Church will have to revise fundamentally its managing instruments and thinking. To think

in a classic modern way in terms of social forms and of super- and subordination will no longer work. This (typically Catholic, typically modern) posture is only prolonging the fatal institutional and substantial fiction of self-evident ecclesiastic social forms, an attitude that stands in conceptual contradiction with the logics of their addressees. It would be more appropriate to the fluid reality of our time to think in situational terms, so through the double index of place and time, and to think also in terms of task-orientation and, on that basis, to develop flexible social forms through a process of open search and permanent evaluation.

This also demonstrates the need for fundamental transformation of all those conventional ecclesiastic social forms: the acknowledgement of the now structural selflessness of ecclesiastic pastoral power and of their risky and non-self-evident character. After all, the 'individualization of the outside' has long since taken place, including at and in those (only seemingly) old loci. Community is no longer a given. Nor is it in the religious field. It has to be constantly (re)built and (re)constituted.

The territorial, ecclesiastic organization at the parish level continues to be worth striving for. Yet, it is then turned into the key element of a selfless structure, through which the Christian message is offered, and this also goes to those places where the Church has definitively lost all community-building power. The theological term for this selfless offering of God's proximity in word and deed is 'grace'. The abiding tasks for the territorial parish would hence have to be reformulated through a theology of grace.

It would mean, above all, that the specific *charismatic richness of the territorial parish* would have to be released. The congregation should have the opportunity to realize what it has been given as a gift. Similarly, it should not have to realize what has not been given to it as a gift. Certainly, the congregation has two indispensable commitments, and they, too, are grounded in the theology of grace: the liturgy and the creative reaction to the specific 'signs of the times' on site. *Liturgy*, after all, is the central fulfilment of the Church in the theology of grace. It is the place where humans discreetly open up to each other in the face of God's eternal love. It is the humble and grateful celebration of God's effective grace. The '*signs of the times*', though, are the challenges with which the present confronts the People of God, and the responses which the People of God still have to develop on the basis of the Gospel. According to *Gaudium et Spes* 4, faith cannot be passed on without perceiving these challenges.

We are currently experiencing the beginning of the end of a centuries-old type of Church constitution. This means no less than the running-out of a phase in Church history, during which the Church possessed real sanctioning power with respect to religious, political, legal,

and social issues, and during which it projected its social formats necessarily as self-evident institutions.

The attempt to articulate new concepts, which allow the discerning of what is new in the processes of Church development, is only just starting. It is open-ended, and it will never be completed. In the Catholic Church, this attempt could begin by no longer misunderstanding the last Council as a reform council, but as a truly spiritual challenge with regard to Church formation. This challenge would then consist of trusting in the Vatican's conception of exposure rather than in Tridentine social technology: the Church does not lose itself in the outside; it discovers itself there because that is where it realizes whether, where, and how far its faith will carry (it).

"Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces."³⁸ Pope Francis writes this in *Evangelii Gaudium*. This is another way of articulating the 'pastoral conversion'³⁹ which awaits the Catholic Church.

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³⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223.

³⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27.

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