

FERENC PATSCH SJ
Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8927-1127>

SECULARIZATION, MODELS OF THE CHURCH AND SPIRITUALITY: THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S TRENDS

How could anyone predict the future of the Church? The years and decades to come will hold many surprises, but the one thing we know for sure is *omnia aliter*: everything will be different than we once imagined. In this essay, we sketch some of the most likely shifts in the light of already-observable trends. Several experts have already attempted such a task: literary critics, economists, historians, political scientists, philosophers,¹ and theologians,² with varying success. Their courage deserves recognition. In this paper, we follow their footsteps, using the best hermeneutics available. First, we interpret the most significant global trend today: secularization

¹ Many have long been trying to predict and describe the future in the form of political utopias and science fiction. Among them, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (first published in 1934), and George Orwell's *1984* (first published in 1949) are the best known. More recently, many have undertaken a similar endeavor even from an economic point of view, for example by Paul Kennedy (*Preparing for the Twenty-first Century*, London: HarperCollins Publishers 1993), Hamish McRea (*The World in 2020: Power, Culture and Prosperity: A Vision of the Future*, London: HarperCollins 1994), and Jacques Attali (*Une brève histoire de l'avenir*, Paris: Fayard 2012). Most recently, Yuval Noah Harari's philosophical-historical futurological success books are worth to mention (primarily *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, New York: HarperCollins 2017). The accuracy of these predictions varies to a degree, and some are still unverifiable.

² One of the most notable is Karl Rahner's various attempts (*The Christian of the Future*, Freiburg: Herder & Herder 1967; *The Future of Theology*, in: K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 11, London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1974; *The Future of Christian Communities*, in: K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1991, pp. 120-133; *The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future*, *ibidem*, pp. 103-114; *The Spirituality of the Church*, *ibidem*, pp. 143-153, etc.). For more recent attempts, see J.M. Duque, *Para una teología do futuro da futuro da teología*, "Carthaginensia" 35 (2019), no. 68, pp. 343-376, L. Oviedo Torró, *El futuro de la teología, teología del futuro: diagnóstico y pronóstico*, "Carthaginensia" 35 (2019), no. 68, pp. 377-398. Some further attempts: H. Küng, *Truthfulness: The Future of the Church*, London: Sheed & Ward 1968; K.J. Ahern (ed.), *Visions of Hope: Emerging Theologians and the Future of the Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2013; G. Alberigo, *Conciliarità, futuro delle chiese*, in: A. Melloni, S. Scatena (eds.), *Synod and Synodality. Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact*, Münster: LIT 2005, pp. 463-488; E. Parmentier, *The Future of the "community of Protestant Churches in Europe"*, in: A. Melloni, S. Scatena (eds.), *Synod and Synodality. Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact*, Münster: LIT 2005, pp. 663-676.

(sections 1). Second, we present and evaluate models for the future of the Church, paying particular attention to the Magisterium of Pope Francis (sections 2). Finally, we predict likely developments in the area of spirituality (sections 3).

1. CURRENT SECULARIZATION

We begin with a principle: the future is unpredictable. Not only do future events depend on free human choices and actions, but they are influenced by a myriad of factors outside of human control.

Three examples come to mind. Who would have thought, even in January 2020, that a devastating pandemic would break out? When we heard about a contagious illness in Wuhan and the subsequent draconian measures imposed by the Chinese government, most of us were still shaking our heads in disbelief. Even in our wildest dreams, we did not assume that in a few months, following a global political decision, the world economy would shut down, aviation would cease to exist, and words like “travel ban” and “lockdown” would become common parlance. It seemed unlikely that in Western countries, the state would have a say in the lives of its citizens as it did during World War II. Our new historical experience was completely unpredictable.

A second example is the collapse of the Soviet Union. Admittedly, many historians, economists, and political scientists argue that the end of Soviet power and the fall of the Berlin Wall were inevitable because “socialist planned management” is unsustainable. However, these experts cannot explain why, at the time, even the most competent political and economic analysts did not foresee the upcoming events. The future seems predictable only in retrospect.

One last example: who was able to predict even a single day before February 24th, 2022 that the Russian Federation would launch a “special war operation” and invade neighboring Ukraine? Even now, the world’s most competent analysts, military experts and politicians are only guessing at the long-term consequences of this event.³ An accurate prediction seems impossible because the future depends on the possible, non-determined decisions of historical actors.

However, while the future is obscured by the “veil of ignorance,” it is not *completely* inaccessible. Let us revisit the above examples: was the outbreak of the pandemic really unpredictable? Epidemiological experts have always been aware that such events occur periodically, with statistical probability at certain intervals,

³ An example of this attempt is the articles in Project Syndicate, a “think tank” that brings together the world’s most competent economic and political analysts. The website is evidence of both the possibility of predicting the future and its limitations.

and have been able to model the threat (based on the speed of the spread and the mortality rate) using mathematical models.⁴ There is even cultural evidence that a pandemic was “expected” to happen in its continued representation in film: several Hollywood disaster movies “predicted” a pandemic in the near future (the best-known of which was the 1995 *Outbreak*).

Nor was the collapse of the socialist world order an “out of the blue” event. Admittedly, the specific details were unpredictable: the actions of individuals (such as Mikhail Gorbachev) and the peaceful tenor of the whole transition (except a few rifle shots in Romania) in Central and Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, it would be naive to think that, in secret meetings of the KGB (who knew the real performance of the socialist economy), nobody had discussed possible scenarios for the transition. We cannot seriously believe that Imre Pozsgai, who announced in 1989 that the Hungarian government would open the country’s western border to East German refugees, had not received permission from the Moscow authorities before making this decision. In a country where Soviet soldiers had been stationed “temporarily” for more than forty years, such an event, tantamount to the demolition of the Iron Curtain, could not have taken place on a “spontaneous initiative.”

Nor can it be considered mere coincidence that a former KGB counter-officer like Vladimir Putin has risen to the post of Russian prime minister. Of course, it is already largely due to unfortunate historical contingencies that Putin has decided to annex Ukraine. However, the great world powers recognized the possibility of such a plan; it was by no means a total surprise (as evidenced by the readiness of the Ukrainian army at the time of the invasion).

At least three conclusions can be drawn from what has been said so far. First, based on the above considerations, it can be concluded that historical events can be predicted (at least with a certain probability) on the basis of definite emerging trends.⁵ It is not as if the Hegelian divine “mind” (*Geist*) reigns in history.⁶ Human culture and history form a complex fabric in which everything is connected to everything; a single unexpected event can change it significantly, overturning the conclusions drawn from previous trends. Second, we must treat all predictions with a grain of salt and not take them for granted. There is not determinism in nature, but rather indeterminism (or, to a certain degree, freedom) in which we ourselves take part. The third conclusion is related to this (hermeneutical) aspect:

⁴ With the involvement of mathematicians, for example, the Boston-based Center for Complex Network Research has made surprisingly accurate predictions about the spread of the epidemic (about the theoretical background see the research of the Center, A.-L. Barabási, *Bursts: The Hidden Patterns Behind Everything We Do, from Your E-mail to Bloody Crusades*, New York: Dutton 2010).

⁵ Francis Fukuyama’s famous and much debated thesis (*The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Macmillan 1992) on the end of a bipolar world order (“End of History”) seems to be true for the period from 1990 to 2022 (until the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War).

⁶ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Werke in 20 Bänden, Bd. 12), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1996, p. 20.

Our predictions about the future are influenced by our own expectations, intentions, and preconceived notions, which play a role in both selection and interpretation of our data.⁷ We do not predict the future unequivocally, but rather with a hope that we can influence the course of events.

The past centuries have brought an epochal change in the history of Western thought and consciousness. In his now-classic work *A Secular Age*, the Canadian, Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor asks, “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”⁸ Something has happened in the Western tradition over the last 500 years, something which not only allows for the possibility of religious unbelief and non-belief, but has also made this choice a default position (for all, not just the notoriously unbelieving intelligentsias of the modern academia).⁹ Today, it is faith – not unbelief or non-belief – which needs to be explained and justified. We have entered the age of secularization.

The term “secularization” is taken here in the most common use of the word: the decline of religious influence and, more technically, the proliferation of religious and existential alternatives and choices in society. Today, secularization is the general horizon for theorizing the future in a religiously-globalized and globalizing Western world.

Secularization is often understood as the inevitable fate or destiny of all modernizing societies. According to this conceptualization, modernity is inversely related to religiosity: the more modern the society, the less religious it is. This manifests in two ways, familiar to people in the West: “believing without belonging” and its corollary, “belonging without believing.”¹⁰

⁷ On the “situated” and “motivated” nature of knowledge (especially historical knowledge) cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Crossroad 1992, especially *The Elevation of the Historicity of Understanding to the Status of a Hermeneutic Principle*, pp. 265-306.

⁸ Ch. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, London – Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2007, p. 25. The book is a “Master of Reform Narrative” (*A Secular Age*, pp. 773-776) in the form of a “set of interlocking essays” (*A Secular Age*, p. ix). It provides a deep, historical analysis of the concept of “secularization” for about 800 pages, totally refuting all unhistorical (thus more or less ideological) approaches to the phenomenon of secularization. Taylor expressly intends to provide a descriptive answer to the question of how the “secular option” (in Taylor “exclusive humanism”) became possible in the Western cultural tradition ruled by Roman and Latin Christianity.

⁹ It seems that Taylor’s magistrate book *A Secular Age* has not lost its relevance since its first publication in 2007. It continues to be not a final answer, but an inevitable starting point in today’s debate on secularization. Taylor develops a genealogical transcendental argument for this epochal change indicated above. He answers the question: how did the secular-existential option or “exclusive humanism” become the experiential possibility that is today? Taylor’s view (cf. *The Validity of Transcendental Arguments*, „Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society” 79 [1979], issue 1, pp. 151-166) is presented (in the early stages of the development of his thought) in a form of the transcendental argument.

¹⁰ Cf. G. Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 1995; more shortly: G. Davie, *Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?*, „Social Compass” 37 (1990), no. 4, pp. 455-469.

We commence the investigation from a European perspective. Let us illustrate the situation on the old continent with some data representing the southernmost and northernmost parts of the continent: Italy and Finland. According to a recent study, 30 to 35 percent of young adult Italians say they believe in God, 10 to 15 percent say they do not believe, and more than half say they sometimes believe and sometimes not.¹¹ An even more pronounced example of Italian de-Christianization is the decline in the number of diocesan priests. In 1871, there were 100,525 Catholic diocesan priests living in Italy; by the beginning of the third millennium this number had dropped to almost a third, 36,133.¹² The number of people practicing their religion is declining steadily and the number of “nones” (people without religious affiliation) is growing rapidly in virtually every Western society.

This rise in the number of so-called “nones” is one of the most surprising changes in Western religiosity.¹³ For a long time, those who did affiliate with an institutional religious tradition were found mainly in extensions of Europe (typically in Anglophone areas like North America, Australia, and New Zealand). According to recent studies, however, the phenomenon is spreading in former high-fertility countries like Chile, Brazil, and Iran, which are catching up gradually to the demographic and religious trends of Europe.¹⁴ The rapid growth of “nones” means a rapid break with tradition: “Christian society” (Christendom) ceases to exist.

¹¹ G. Dalpiaz, “*Volete andarvene anche voi?*”. *La fede dei giovani e la vita religiosa*, Bologna: Dehoniane 2017, pp. 49-50.

¹² G. Dalpiaz, “*Volete andarvene anche voi?*”, pp. 109-110. We could add to this the current tendencies of the international Jesuit order. The Society of Jesus reached the peak of its membership in 1965 with 36,038 Jesuits. In 2022 there are 14,818 Jesuits worldwide. In 2021, only a total of 26 people across Europe joined the Society of Jesus; 60-70 years ago, more people entered a *single* Spanish province than that (there were seven Spanish provinces at the time!).

¹³ One of the earliest sociological studies of the “nones” or religiously unaffiliated was Colin Campbell, *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (International Higher Education, Macmillan) in 1971, but only during the latest fifteen or so years has the social scientific study of secularity and nonreligion established itself as an independent area of research (cf. L. Lee, *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015; J. Quack, C. Schuh [ed.], *Religious Indifference: New Perspectives From Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017; P. Zuckerman, L.W. Galen, F.L. Pasquale [eds.], *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies*, New York: Oxford University Press 2016). *Secularism and Nonreligion*, founded in 2012, is the first academic journal devoted totally to the study of the secular in its various manifestations.

¹⁴ Cf. P. Jenkins, *Crucible of Faith: The Ancient Revolution That Made Our Modern Religious World*, New York: Basic Books 2017; P. Jenkins, *Fertility and Faith: The Demographic Revolution and the Transformation of World Religions*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press 2020. We note that Jenkins changed his previous position (expressed in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003 and *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible In the Global South*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006) according to which Christianity had exploded in the global south (especially Latin America) in the light of recent empirical data (demographic trends and secularization in the so-called Third World). See also David Martin’s research (*Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Oxford – Cambridge: Blackwell 1993).

In further support of this, let us return once again to the well-documented situation of the Italian Church. The well-known sociologist from Turin, Franco Garelli, long involved in historical research of ecclesiastical sociology,¹⁵ recently commissioned an extensive survey of the current state of Italian religiosity on behalf of the Italian Episcopal Faculty. The €100,000 survey reported staggering results.¹⁶ 40 percent of young people in Italy today live completely without God. The statistics show a decline at all levels over the past 25 years: only 82 percent answered that they believe in God (or a “higher power”); 75 percent believed that religion could help find meaning in life; Mass attendance fell from 30 to 22 percent; while in the past, almost 90 percent declared themselves Catholic, now only 76 percent do so (even among Italians!). It is clear from the data that even in traditionally “religious” southern societies, a dramatic secularization process is taking place: 40 percent of Italians said they were “cultural Catholics,” the most evident category of the last 20 years. These are the Catholics who approve of putting crucifixes on the walls of schools and public buildings, but who lack any form of intense religious life. The number of those who support euthanasia has doubled in the last 25 years (63 percent) and only 20 percent strongly oppose abortion (if a serious health problem occurs, 83 percent of the population consider it acceptable). In all likelihood, these trends will also prevail (or are present already) in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. It is unlikely that these world trends could be reversed in the long run by political decisions. The aggressive pursuit of this change could be even counterproductive. To some extent, these trends validate Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s prediction that world history is a history of increasing freedom¹⁷: the world is moving toward a decline in external authority and an increase in individual autonomy.

This is not only true of the European Catholic Church. Secularization tendencies seem to plague Protestant denominations even more. The former state churches, for example, are gradually losing their hegemony in the traditionally-Protestant societies of Northern Europe. According to a recent study by the Research Center of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, only 23 percent of Finns born in the 1990s say they are religious, and Generations Y and Z are more influenced by New Age spirituality¹⁸ than traditional religiosity. Thus, it is foreseeable that professed religious affiliation

¹⁵ Cf. F. Garelli et al., *La religiosità in Italia*, Milan: Mondadori 1996; F. Garelli, R. Ferrero Camoletto, *Una spiritualità in movimento*, Padova: Messaggero 2003; other books of F. Garelli: *Sfide per la chiesa del nuovo secolo. Indagine sul clero in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2003; *L’Italia cattolica nell’epoca del pluralismo*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2006; *La Chiesa in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2007; *Piccoli atei crescono. Davvero una generazione senza Dio?*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2016.

¹⁶ F. Garelli, *Indagine del sociologo sulla religiosità dai 18 agli 80 anni*, “Corriere della Sera” 31 dicembre 2020, p. 29.

¹⁷ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 20.

¹⁸ I owe these figures to Alpo Penttinen, doctoral student at the Pontifical Gregorian University. H. Salomäki et al. (eds.), *Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa. Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko vuosina 2016-2019*, Helsinki: Kirkon Tutkimuskeskus 2020, pp. 38, 82.

will become a minority position in the near future as the predominantly non-religious millennial generation replaces the older, more publicly religious generation. In the largest Finnish cities, less than half of newborns are baptized, a significant change in a society considered to be the most Lutheran in the world. At the turn of the millennium, 85 percent of Finnish citizens said they belonged to a religious denomination (in almost all cases, the Finnish Lutheran Church). Two decades later, the former state Church dropped to under 70 percent of the population, and the decline continues with rapid speed. Moreover, religious belonging and doctrinal belief are two different things. In 1999, for example, 47 percent of Finns responded on a survey that they believed in the God of Christianity, compared to only 25 percent twenty years later.¹⁹

How should we evaluate these phenomena? In order to maintain the Church's credibility (or regain its battered authority), our approach towards secularization matters. The traditional ecclesiastical posture towards the "world" is well-known: the world is crumbling, hurtling into darkness, and merits damnation. For the past about 150 years (roughly until the middle of the 20th century), this militant antimodernism was the dominant church narrative, without a doubt. In some ecclesiastical circles, the same stock phrases echo: "Unbelief is growing." "There are fewer and fewer believers, and more and more atheists." "The virus has killed the Church." This doomsday rhetoric is inadequate; it calls for a deeper analysis. To begin, we must honestly answer two questions. First: have we ourselves remained completely free from secularization? Second: if not, is such secularization necessarily a negative trend akin to "ungodliness"? I propose that the answer to both questions is "no."

To justify this positive reading of secularization, let us consider three examples. The first is within the context of missiology. While we are not proud of it, it is true that until World War II, the colonial aspirations of the Western powers and the missionary activity of the Church went hand in hand. On the one hand, colonialism helped the spread of Christianity, or more precisely, the cultural-political export of a *certain form* of it: the rooting of the Western Church model on other continents (called *Christendom* or *societas Christiana*). On the other hand, it led to the destruction of many cultures and had disastrous social consequences. We can rejoice that today's missionaries are not, at least not automatically, trying to provide an ideological basis for the ongoing (and not infrequently violent) economic and political efforts of Western nation-states.²⁰ It is to be welcomed that the Church

¹⁹ H. Salomäki et al. (eds.), *Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa*, pp. 74-75.

²⁰ The connection between the current Russian state and its officially religious ideology of the Moscow Patriarchate is worthy of more-detailed study in the future. It is extremely remarkable that three weeks after the outbreak of the war, theologians belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate and other Orthodox churches condemned in a voluminous statement the Russian religious nationalism (*ethnophiletism*) whose ideology, in principle, serves as the basis for the war. The text (which clearly has an internal relationship with the 1934 Barmen Theological Declaration against National Socialism, largely drafted by Karl Barth) is the work of Brandon Gallaher (Exeter) of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Greek Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Volos). "A Declaration on the 'Russian World' (russkii

and its theology today turns with great respect to non-Western cultures, and that it seeks to instill the Christian faith in a way that pays close attention to positive elements of culture that are compatible with the Christian faith (the technical term of this approach is “inculturation”).²¹

In addition to missiology, ecclesiology has also changed in recent decades. Fortunately, only older people remember that prior to Vatican II, official ecclesiastical teaching considered it a mortal sin for a Catholic to enter into a non-Catholic Church. It is good news that we interpret Catholic truth today in a less exclusive way, even reciprocally inviting adherents of other denominations into our own churches to pray together for the unity of the Church. This practice is recommended and supported by Vatican documents of the highest level.²²

Finally, moral theology is also in transition. In the past, parish priests, bishops, and popes have worked hard to take the burden of matters of conscience off the shoulders of believers. They tried to decide for us. Today, we see moral dilemmas less in black and white categories; perhaps we also have more respect for the opinions of others.²³ To offer an existential example: a dedicated Christian medical doctor friend of mine told me once that he has a patient with late-stage cancer. According to the current state of medicine, he is incurable and has terrible pains; he has been practically living on morphine for months. He happens to be an atheist. “When he

mir) teaching” begins: “The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is a historic threat to a people of Orthodox Christian tradition. More troubling still for Orthodox believers, the senior hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church has refused to acknowledge this invasion, issuing instead vague statements about the necessity for peace [...] blaming the hostilities on the evil ‘West [...]’.” Subsequently, the Declaration, endorsed by more than a thousand theologians (including many international orthodox authorities), condemns in six points the ideology of the “Russian world” which is supposed to be governed by a single common patriarch and a single national leader. The text condemns and considers as heresy the conception according to which the Kingdom of God can be replaced by this worldly rule; that the church is subordinate to the state and therefore can no longer speak out against injustices; that any national or ethnic community can be hold as sacred; that hatred can be incited among human communities; “rebukes” those who pray for peace but do nothing for it; along with those who do not tell the truth.

²¹ Cf. G. Colzani, *Mission and Church*, in: F. Meroni (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Canterano (RM): Aracne Editrice 2017, pp. 61-126, specially pp. 122-126; S.W. Sunquist, *A Historian’s Hunches. Eight Future Trends in Mission*, in: Ch.E. van Engen (ed.), *The State of Missiology Today. Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2016, pp. 285-297.

²² Cf. P.D. Murray, *Catholicism and Ecumenism*, in: L. Ayres, M.A. Volpe (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press 2019, pp. 905-918.

²³ To see the differences: cf. E.F. Hanahoe, *The Reunion of Christendom in Contemporary Papal Pronouncements*, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press 1953. On the development of Moral Theology in this direction, see J.F. Keenan (ed.), *Catholic Theological Ethics: Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2011; A. Melloni, S. Scatena (eds.), *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contacts*, Münster: LIT 2005, on ecumenical aspects: pp. 463-556. From an interesting evangelical point of view: R. Saarinen, *Ecumenism*, in: W.A. Dyrness, V.-M. Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, Nottingham: InterVarsity Press 2008, pp. 263-269.

is conscious,” my friend says, “he regularly asks me, ‘Doctor, what’s the point of that? I don’t want to live!’ At these moments,” this brave doctor testified to me, “I honestly cannot oppose euthanasia.” Of course, any concrete example would require a varied and thorough analysis. I am rather pointing out that, when a Christian does not try at all costs to force his (unbelieving) fellow citizens to do something they do not understand, it is not legitimate to call it ungodliness and relativism. In matters of faith, persuasion – not coercion – is the correct “strategy” of the Church.

The above examples have hopefully shown two things: firstly, that we have allowed certain forms of “secularization” to enter even into church settings. Secondly, we have shown that aspects of secularization have taken root in our hearts as positive values. If you have ever thought that it is a good idea for Catholic institutions (such as hospitals, hotels, or nursing homes) to be subject to the same laws as public institutions to guarantee financial transparency; if you have ever thought that we should consider the clergy just as accountable as any other civil employee in cases of financial or moral abuse; if you have ever thought these things, then you have embraced aspects of secularization. Strange though it may seem, such a position is not anti-Christian.²⁴

We would consider it extremely worrying if the dramatic political, social, cultural, and scientific changes of the last two centuries had not affected the Church at all. Think of the emergence of new ideas and movements such as socialism, secularism, liberalism, feminism, workers’ movements, or even industrialization. Unfortunately, these innovations have most often presented themselves as anti-church in the past, as their representatives felt that the Church did not support them in favor of conservative regimes. This feeling was not always unfounded: think of Franco’s movement in Spain, the Mussolini era in Italy, the French restoration efforts of the 19th century. It took a long time for the Church to respond positively and constructively to modernity. This response ultimately lay in the transformation of the Church itself.

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), changes of unprecedented proportions were introduced, which affected both pastoral-religious life and intellectual-theological reflection. Consider the liturgical reforms²⁵: instead of Latin, the Church switched to the use of vernacular languages worldwide. The relationship with the Bible also changed. Simple believers were not previously allowed to read the Bible, as its interpretation was reserved for the Catholic clergy. An elderly Jesuit brother from South Italy once told me a traumatic story: when the pastor of his

²⁴ Permit me to reference my own study, F. Patsch, *Rivelazione, contesto, verità. Il Magistero di Papa Francesco in tempo di transizione*, in: M. Tenace (ed.), *Dal chiodo alla chiave. La teologia fondamentale di Papa Francesco*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2017, pp. 45-72.

²⁵ In the field of musica sacra, the liturgical reform unfortunately represented a setback in most of Central and Eastern Europe. In fact, in sharp contrast to the intention of the Council fathers, after Vatican II the *participatio activa* (the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy) declined. All this was due to some national and cultural characteristics of the local churches in question.

village visited his family, his father showed the priest the family Bible. The young child had to witness the priest confiscating the Bible from his father. After Vatican II, the personal reading of Scripture was no longer forbidden, but encouraged.

Although the Church has retained its essentially theocratic-monarchical structures, it has become more modern in many external and substantive elements: it has evolved from an absolute monarchy to a more democratic, moderately authoritarian institution. This process continues today with the strengthening of synodal structures and local Church autonomy.²⁶

In this context, the example of the Dutch Church is worth considering. It was a model of conservatism (and an inexhaustible source of vocations) for centuries, where Catholics voted for Dutch Catholic parties as consistently as Protestants voted for political candidates in their own denominations. This rigid structure collapsed almost overnight. Today, the Netherlands is known to be one of the most secular states in Europe. The pendulum is swinging in the opposite direction: after uncritical pursuit of authority, we are now witnessing a dramatic loss of it.

The moral of the story, however, is that – at least according to the theory of the Roman Jesuit historian László Szilas²⁷ – Vatican II prevented a same collapse from occurring on a global scale. Rigid institutions and a one-sided development model are very vulnerable, like monocultures in an ecosystem. The theory seems confirmed by the recent secularization processes taking place in Québec, Franco-Canada, as well as in Poland and Ireland today. Political and cultural formations that appear hyper-Catholic are sidelining the Church in the public sphere and thus, despite all appearances, harming the faith.

Historical experience has shown that a more diverse church that endures a greater “disorder” (and is more distant from power) is more viable than externally-supported, ideologically-disciplined, but one-sided formations. In the long run, there is greater payoff if the Church’s image shifts toward a network of communities based on free commitment and active participation – yet maintaining a strong spiritual radiance. For today, perhaps more than ever, people are searching for places to deepen prayer and satiate their thirst for faith. We can provide them with a framework for active participation, strengthen their sense of belonging and treat them in accord with their human dignity. In essence, we can treat them like what they are, or at least, what they may become through the relationship: adult Christians.

²⁶ For example, we can find an authoritative interpretation of the ongoing 2015 synodal process in the Catholic Church in International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018) and a commentary: A. Melloni, S. Scatena (eds.), *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact*, Münster: LIT 2005.

²⁷ Oral communication of László Szilas SJ (1927-2012).

2. MODELS OF CHURCH AND SPIRITUALITY

Today, the Church is in transition, and rightly so. Otherwise, she would not be able to accomplish her mission in a world changing at lightning speed. But in what direction is the Church developing? We will shortly examine four emerging Church models²⁸ and briefly evaluate their likelihood to occur.

The death of Christianity? Nearly half a century ago, in 1977, the French Catholic historian Jean Delumeau published a book *Le christianisme va-t-il mourir?* (Is Christianity Dying?).²⁹ The title is a deliberate provocation, and it has managed to spark controversy. Delumeau, himself a believing Christian, predicted the transformation of the public role of the Church. According to him, in today's secularized social environment, Christianity will take a new, minority turn. This means that the faith will survive only in very self-conscious, small groups, with the emerging form of the Church appearing very similar to that of the first centuries. In today's spiritual palette, the same idea is present in at least two forms. One is represented by the book by American journalist Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*.³⁰ The author propagates distrust towards the secular world, promoting a defensive and even hostile attitude, and above all, recommends inward construction and strong identity. On the other hand, the thesis of "dying" Christianity emerges most explicitly in the writings of the Israeli star historian Yuval Noah Harari. Harari's captivating rhetoric predicts that Christianity will survive modern times only as a cultural identity and will gradually decline.³¹

Does God fight back? History, however, doesn't seem to support these predictions. In 1991, the French Islamologist Gilles Kepel published a famous, no less provocative book called *La revanche de Dieu* [God strikes back].³² According to his thesis, which is radically different from the model of the Church seen above, we are witnessing the global return of religion. The idea is based on the observation,

²⁸ In his well-researched publication, the Italian politician and public intellectual Andrea Riccardi examines far more possibilities, but in my view these are the most important ones. Cf. A. Riccardi, *Chiesa, Chiese e cristianesimo dal concilio a oggi*, in: O. Aime et al. (eds.), *Nuovo Dizionario Teologico Interdisciplinare*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane 2020, pp. 707-730. Cf. also G. Routhier, *Cristianesimo e Chiesa del future*, ibidem, pp. 731-747; G. Wills, *The Future of the Catholic Church with Pope Francis*, New York: Viking, Penguin Group 2015. The models used here do not correspond to the famous ecclesiological models of Avery R. Dulles (cf. *Models of the Church*, New York: Doubleday 2002).

²⁹ J. Delumeau, *Le Christianisme va-t-il mourir?*, Paris: Hachette 1977.

³⁰ R. Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, New York: Sentinel 2017.

³¹ Cf. Y.N. Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, New York: Spiegel & Grau 2018, chapter 8.

³² G. Kepel, *La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde*, Paris: Seuil 1991.

also supported by the Spanish-American sociologist José Casanova³³ and others, that religiosity has returned unexpectedly (and in a measurable way) to the political sphere and public discourse. Think of the broadcasted appearances of the popes, watched by hundreds of millions worldwide. Consider the institution of “pastoral visits,” by Pope John Paul II in 1978 after his election. These religious events attracted amazing crowds around the globe. These examples demonstrate the possibility that postmodernity and religion go well together. After all, the Islamic leader Ayatollah Khomeini, rapidly returned to Muslim public life during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. How would these phenomena be reconciled with the alleged “dying” of religion?

The growing influence of the “third world”? Some of the sharp-eyed analysts of today’s phenomena diagnose a crisis situation exclusively in Western Christianity. Their theory seems to be supported by some ongoing demographic processes, which predict that the southern hemisphere of the world will be the custodian of the future of the Church. While numbers are declining in Europe, North America, and Australia, the Church is showing unprecedented vitality in some areas of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. When looking for a new model of Catholicism, we must not forget the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, whose emotional, confident religiosity offers a clear identity and calls for participation.³⁴ This is a trend recognized for nearly 50 years; its chief advocate was the German missionary Walbert Bühlmann, who published his famous book in 1974 entitled *The Coming of the Third Church*. The title of the work, along with the subtitle – *An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* – is a program in itself that shows from today’s “signs of the times” that the churches of the southern hemisphere will soon prevail over the still-dominant Western Church, unburdened as they by the ballast of history.

The “Church of the poor”? Finally, there is a fourth model, which today seems best represented by Pope Francis’ pontificate. Of course, it is a risky thing to evaluate about what is happening *today*, since we yet lack a historical perspective.³⁵ However, it seems certain that Pope Francis will have an enduring role in Church history as

³³ Cf. The central thesis of Casanova’s famous book (*Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago, IL – London: The University of Chicago Press 1994, p. 5) is that religion is, so to speak, “de-privatized” in the modern world. By de-privatization he means the fact that “religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as the theories of secularization had reserved for them.”

³⁴ Cf. A. Riccardi, *Chiesa, Chiese e cristianesimo dal concilio a oggi*, pp. 707-730. Cf. also G. Routhier, *Cristianesimo e Chiese del future*, pp. 731-747; G. Wills, *The Future of the Catholic Church*, 2015.

³⁵ For good and informative biographies of Jorge Bergoglio/Francis, see A. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, New York: Henry Holt 2014; A. Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church*, New York: Henry Holt 2019; and E. Piqué, *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution*, Chicago, IL: Loyola Press 2014.

the pope who draw the world's attention to the fate of the poor.³⁶ Of course, there is nothing new in this endeavor: the so-called liberation theology movement has recently drawn public attention to the global fate of those excluded from the welfare world; however, their efforts at the time were not crowned with immediate success. The analyses of liberation theologians were intertwined with Marxism, and some of their followers were prone to violence as well. These factors damaged trust with the official Church. John Paul II also condemned the theology of liberation in two encyclicals (*Libertatis Nuntius*, 1984; *Libertatis Conscientia*, 1986), although he always emphasized the proximity of the Catholic Church to the poor.

The breakthrough came only during the pontificate of Pope Francis. He, for the first time in eight long centuries, was a non-European pope who articulated a critique of capitalism beyond that of the liberation theologians (whose aims and vocabulary were partly embraced in Church documents).³⁷ This change in attitudes in the Vatican is also reflected in a book jointly published in 2014 by Gerhard Ludwig Müller (former cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) and Gustavo Gutiérrez (the “founding father” of liberation theology) entitled *Armut: Die Herausforderung für den Glauben*.³⁸ All this proves that the productive insights of the movement are now embedded in the teaching of the official Church and, as Pope Francis says, the Church has become the “Church of the poor.”³⁹

Evaluating of the models. – Now we evaluate these (at times contradictory) models. Without denying the limitations of our own perspective, we believe that

³⁶ In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis prophetically cries out: “We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them” (EG 48); and further writes: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” (EG 198).

³⁷ If we examine only Pope Francis’ first programmatic apostolic exhortation, the above mentioned *Evangelii Gaudium*, published on November 24, 2013, it is striking how he criticizes the vices of global capitalism in a courageous way that goes beyond all the expectation of the liberation theologians. According to the Pope, the social order of capitalism is based on exclusion (no. 53), its adoration for money (no. 55) and its socially unjust structures (no. 60). In the following analysis Francis mentions no less than six times (in four chapters) the key thesis of liberation theology (and always in a positive context): “preferential option for the poor / the poorest / the last” (nos. 195, 198, 199, 200). The terminology of the whole apostolic exhortation is also revealing: the pope speaks about “the kingdom of God” (nos. 180-181), explaining the “structural causes of poverty” (no. 202), emphasizes the importance of “solidarity” (no. 187), recalls the “cry” of the poor and the oppressed (nos. 187, 193), uses the category of “social evil” (no. 202) and even the term “alienation” (no. 196) – all these concepts are characteristic of the vocabulary of liberation theologians.

³⁸ G. Gutiérrez, G.L. Müller, *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2015. The title of the Italian translation is even more eloquent: *Dalla parte dei poveri. Teologia della liberazione, teologia della chiesa*, Padova: Messaggero Padua 2013.

³⁹ Cf., as we have already mentioned above, EG 48. See also C. Sedmak, *A Church of the Poor: Pope Francis and the Transformation of Orthodoxy*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2016; S.C. Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2018.

there is some truth in all four models. However, none can be seen as the exclusive path to the future.

The model that predicts the decline (or, in a liberal form, “dying”) of religion, and more specifically of Christianity, will undoubtedly find support in statistical-demographic data indicating the continuation of the secularization process. We have to get used to the decline in numbers, in particular in the Western world. The decline in religious practice in Europe is an undeniable fact for all observing the current situation; moreover, these are tendencies that cannot be easily reversed by the political will of a single government. Today we are living the end of *Christendom*, but this does not entail the end of Christianity. Pope Francis often talks about the disappearance of the “folk Church” (*Volkskirche*, *chiesa popolare*), the form of “Christianity” as a cultural formation, based on a unified (Western) worldview of metaphysics and its socio-political institutions. This “folk Christianity” is replaced by something new.

Religion never develops in a straight line. There are observable dialectical movements: periods of rebirth are replaced by crises, then growth again. This is evident also in the way God “strikes back,” so to speak, in the present history of Christianity. Without offering a detailed analysis of the worldwide Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, the phenomenon has sparked a rate of growth never before seen among the history of religious movements.⁴⁰ Just over a century ago, the movement embarked on a journey from a suburban congregation in Los Angeles, where a one-eyed, black, Texas-immigrant preacher began preaching about renewal in the Spirit. From this humble beginning, a movement began which now has at least 400 million followers worldwide and accounts for roughly one-fifth of the world’s Christianity. The Catholic Church unfortunately includes disproportionately few Charismatics (roughly 120 million).⁴¹

It is not far from the truth to predict a strengthening of the influence of the “third world” in the Church of the future. The demographic focus of Christianity, according to the richly documented research of British historian Philip Jenkins,⁴² is shifting toward the southern hemisphere of the world, and in a few decades the “third world” churches will predominate. Figuratively speaking, Christianity – and

⁴⁰ A.H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014; A. Anderson et al., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA – London: University of California Press 2010; D.E. Miller, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press 2007.

⁴¹ Some data about the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement: Latin-America: 73.604.000; Asia: 9.742.000; Europa: 11.021.000; North America: 9.742.000; Africa: 8.771.000 (cf. E. Pace, A. Buttici, *Le religioni pentecostali*, Roma: Carocci 2010, p. 16; the numbers have substantially increased since then).

⁴² Cf. P. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016, pp. 178-193.

the Catholic Church in it – has gradually become “colored”: by 2060, with the continuation of current trends, the world’s largest Christian countries will be Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, the United States, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and Uganda (nearly one billion of the three billion Christians will live in these countries).⁴³ This means that San Paolo, Lagos, Kinshasa, and Manila will be the capitals of Christianity, not Paris, Berlin, or Madrid. Instead of an aging, tired Europe, faith will flourish on other continents (primarily Africa and, to a lesser extent, Latin America).

According to demographic projections, the formation of the “Church of the poor” seems unstoppable. This will lead to a number of new pastoral priorities, such as the elimination of social injustice and the overcoming of poverty. We can also predict the revival of “basic communities,” which not only provide an intensive experience of religious life for their members, but also ensure material-existential support modeled on the ancient church communities. Although the term “third church” is not widely used (the “third world” seems to be more a stigma nowadays), the majority of Christians will be *de facto* living in the poorer parts of the globe. Christianity, then, will no longer be the religion of the elderly, white, rich people; instead, it will be permeated by the dynamism, sense of freedom, and joy of the young and colorful ecclesial communities of the southern hemisphere.⁴⁴ Pope Francis is the forerunner of such a Church.

The election of the current pope in March 2013 caused quite a stir in the Church. Since we have not seen a non-European Pope in the chair of Peter for nearly 13 centuries, we are not accustomed to someone who does not speak primarily to us Europeans, who does not see reality from our own perspective and has different priorities. It is no coincidence, then, that Pope Bergoglio’s view is very positive on a global scale, except in the West: the churches in Europe and North America are responding with considerable resistance to his initiatives. This is especially true of the Eastern European region, where political interests shape public opinion using religion as an instrument. According to our thesis, they do not see clearly enough the trends and challenges of Christianity today.

As mentioned above, we assume that the world we live in is changing by leaps and bounds. An important aspect of these changes is globalization, which has had a major impact on John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI’s pontificates. Through pastoral visits and youth encounters (World Youth Days, for instance), they created a new genre of public spectacle in the history of humanity and multimedia communication. Their symbolic gestures (kissing the earth, embracing the sick, etc.)

⁴³ This is an extension of the UN projection reported by J.L. Allen Jr., *The Future Church. How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*, New York – London: Doubleday 2009, p. 18. See more in M.J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2018; R.M. Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass 2004.

⁴⁴ Cf. J.L. Allen Jr., *The Future Church*, pp. 31-32.

made a profound impact, and the Masses they celebrated, attended by millions, grew into mass events of unprecedented significance. Pope Francis, himself an excellent communicator, continued these traditions, but he took some new initiatives as well: as the first Jesuit pope in history, he took on the task of renewing entrenched ecclesiastical structures. Many hold that his election at the 2013 conclave was just a coincidence. However, if we read the events with the “eyes of faith” (to use the terminology of Pierre Rousselot), the cardinals seem to have chosen him by the Holy Spirit: through their prayerful discernment they understood accurately the direction of the future Church. This direction is shaped by the following:

The process of world unification (globalization) continues, despite a temporary slowdown by the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel and communication have become easy, borders are becoming more fluid. The flow of migrants continues unabated. Cultural pluralism is on the rise, leading to the advance of the postmodern. We see the end of the “great narratives,” the traditional ideologies (Communism, colonialism, *societas Christiana*). Although the war between Russia and Ukraine is a setback to a bipolar world (China embracing a weakened Russia versus the West),⁴⁵ in the long run both the new world order and ecclesiastical and theological thinking are moving away from a Eurocentric focus towards a new, multipolar phase. Those shaken and destabilized by these changes need not fear: crises have always existed in the life of the Church. The apostles Peter and Paul argued passionately about the validity of Jewish law; Alaric’s Visigoths invaded Rome in 410; Bonapartism in the 19th century threatened the very existence of the Vatican. There is nothing new under the sun, but Christianity so far seems to have had the inner strength and creativity needed for renewal.

Perhaps a sign of this is Pope Francis’ new, unusual pontificate, which is gradually injecting Vatican communication with new vocabulary familiar to charismatic renewal movements, vocabulary that is sensitive to aspects of renewal, liberation, and contextualization.

The Catholic Church grows stronger in the southern hemisphere of the Earth, from which Pope Francis comes. The most telling sign of this shift is the ongoing change in the composition of the College of Cardinals. The College of Cardinals has become increasingly “colorful” in recent decades and, while still far from reflecting real demographics, is slowly moving towards a balance of power (although, for historical reasons, women are still spectacularly absent).

In the light of the above, it should not be surprising why the fate of the poor – their visibility, their liberation – is a priority for Pope Francis. It is understandable that he is not thinking in the identity model of the European and North American Church, seeking to build strong cohesion and institutional unity. Some within this

⁴⁵ Cf. on the foreseeable future of the world, F. de la Iglesia Viguiristi, *L'economia mondiale esce dal Covid ed entra in Guerra*, “La Civiltà Cattolica” 4123 (2022), pp. 9-22; F. de la Iglesia Viguiristi, *Le conseguenze economiche della guerra di Putin*, “La Civiltà Cattolica” 4125 (2022), pp. 239-253.

model are determined to defend the values of Western civilization (anti-migration, pro-life, anti-euthanasia, the so-called traditional family model); they often use the Catholic Church as an ideological shield against non-Western cultures and are often disappointed with Pope Francis's pontificate. It would be wrong to simply label them "traditionalists" and frame them as the "opposition" to the current pope. The real issue is that they do not appreciate the depth with which the current processes are taking place. They are more the victims of error than malicious adversaries. Their widespread (and generally benevolent) error, then, does not relate to doctrinal questions, but rather to their conception of the future of the Church.

Let us return to the problem of secularization. We have seen above that the most common master narrative in the West was the assumption that modernity and religion were inversely related. But this so-called "secularization theory" (which has dominated the modern social sciences over the past two centuries as a virtually unquestionable assumption⁴⁶) is now, if not overturned, at least in need of a major reassessment. Empirical research has shown that it would be a rough simplification to talk about a gradual decline (or even disappearance) of religious beliefs in the modern world. From a global perspective, it is clear that since World War II, religious traditions in most parts of the world have either shown growth or at least retained their vitality.⁴⁷ Even one of the most prominent representatives of the secularization thesis, the Austro-American sociologist of religion Peter Berger, has re-evaluated his previous position.⁴⁸ Evidence is undeniable. In a highly successful book in the mid-1990s, José Casanova showed⁴⁹ that religion, rather than disappearing, "went public" in the modern world. It became public in both senses of the word: it both concerned itself more deeply with public issues and was noticed in the public sphere: in mass media, social sciences and politics. By now, perhaps we have the grounds to re-evaluate the concept of secularization with some caution and reserve, even from a theological point of view. Pope Francis has already made an important step in this direction.

⁴⁶ The theory of secularization attained paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences, being shared in one form or another by virtually all its founding fathers (Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, E.B. Taylor, James Frazer, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud). For a very useful compilation of most of the key texts of the early social sciences on religion, see N. Birnbaum, G. Lenzer (eds.), *Sociology and Religion: A Book of Readings*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1969.

⁴⁷ Interesting and comprehensive *empirical* research on this growth for both world religions and "primal religions," "cults and civil religions," and "secular worldviews," and the rise of spirituality: F. Whaling (eds.), *Religion in Today's World: The Religious Situation of the World from 1945 to the Present Day*, Edinburg: T&T Clark 1987).

⁴⁸ Cf. P.L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Garden City, MI: Anchor Books 1967; on his later position, see P.L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview*, in: P.L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1999, pp. 11-18.

⁴⁹ Cf. J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

If philosophy is, as Hegel famously puts it, “*ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*” (its own time comprehended in thoughts), then theological reflection cannot follow it without first making some qualifications. Historical relativism is not a realistic option for a theologian, but theology also needs the facts: it must consider its own (historical, linguistic, socio-cultural) context if it wants to spread the good news to people today. The task of theology, consequently, is to interpret and re-read “facts” as “signs of the times” so that the gospel can be embodied in all ages and cultures. The purpose of an authentic theological reading of the signs of the times is to point to Jesus Christ, who is “the sign of Jonah” (Matt. 16:4), a sign of contradiction, even for today’s generation. It is the theologian’s job to lead believers to Jesus Christ for the salvation of the people. The Magisterium of Pope Francis, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is a good example of this activity. A chief sign of the times today, as we have seen above, is that the Church finds itself in a radically new position.

The changed historical-cultural context has already been described by the conciliar fathers of Vatican II. The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* emphasizes that “Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history” (GS 4), as “[t]echnology is now transforming the face of the earth and is already trying to master outer space” (GS 5).⁵⁰ The Magisterium of Pope Francis has frequently alluded to these observations. According to the Pope, we are in the midst of a tectonic shift in our age (cf. VG 3; LS 102): “We are not only living in a time of changes but are experiencing a true epochal shift.”⁵¹ Although Pope Francis does not elaborate on the details of this supposed “epochal change,” he makes some useful references in his encyclical *Laudato si’* to facilitate a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon. This social encyclical letter lists some of the phenomena that have resulted from the accelerating technological development of the last two centuries: the discovery of the steam engine and electricity (automobiles, railways, and airplanes), the revolution in modern medicine and information technology (robotics, biotechnology, nanotechnology) (LS 102) and the unification of the single history of humanity as a whole (LS 165; 181; 207; on the negative effects of globalization: 106-114). As a result, the world has changed and this radical shift continues, as we become more and more aware that “everything [in nature] is interconnected” (LS 91; cf. 16; 117; 120; 137; 138; 240). Something new has begun, but a former epoch ended. Four years later, in 2019, Pope Francis stated quite emphatically in his traditional Christmas speech before the Curia in Rome, “Brothers and sisters, *Christendom no longer exists!*”⁵²

⁵⁰ The conciliar fathers also add that “[t]he destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own” (GS 5).

⁵¹ Francis, *Address to the Fifth National Convention of the Italian Church*, Florence, 10 November 2015.

⁵² In the same place, Pope Francis (*Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, Address of his Holiness Pope Francis, 21 December 2019) quoted Cardinal Newman as saying: “Here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”

The end of Christendom is talked about by many today, so it may be useful to define more precisely the semantic field of this concept. In general, “Christendom” (*Cristianità, Chrétienté, Christentum*) refers to the late Latin Christian *Einheitskultur*, which unified the historically-formed “Christian world,” linking its institutions (patient care, education, legislation, art, politics) to the Catholic Church. This social formation has ceased to exist on both sides of the North Atlantic. However, in Pope Francis’s view, this does not mean that “Christianity” has ceased to exist, as it is still the fastest-growing religion in the world (together with Islam).⁵³ Globally speaking, the thesis of “diminishing influence of religion” is actually unsustainable. The facts prove just the opposite: in a global context, the world is more religious than ever⁵⁴ (albeit in a nuanced sense of “religiosity”⁵⁵).

The Magisterium of Pope Francis has made it clear: Christendom and its cultural hegemony no longer exist. The Christian faith no longer provides the self-evident cultural and semiotic background it provided for the Western world for centuries. A unified Christian culture, if it ever existed, is a thing of the past. In response, certain church circles today speak of an “age of nihilism.”⁵⁶ Pope Francis, rather, offers a two-fold response to the current epochal shift: on the one hand, he acknowledges the eventual disappearance of European Christendom (as “*societas Christiana*”); on the other hand, he maintains a positive view of the global reality of the Church. For Francis, this is a requirement of the “missionary transformation of the church” (EG 19-49), which he constantly urges. All of this necessitates the simultaneous

⁵³ Therefore, any talk of a “post-Christian” world (cf. G.E. Veight Jr., *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books 2020; C. Dotolo, *Teologia e postcristianesimo*, Brescia: Queriniana 2017, etc.) should be clearly delimited to the Western context (where there are also essential differences among countries). From a global perspective, things are so different that Philip Jenkins (cf. *The Next Christendom*) spoke outright about a “Next Christendom” because of the rapid spread of Christianity in the southern hemisphere (Global South). This is often misunderstood: for example, the correct English translation of Gianni Vattimo’s book *Dopo la cristianità* (*Per un cristianesimo non religioso*, Milano: Garzanti 2002) would be “After Christendom” and not “After Christianity” (as the English translation says), Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, New York: Columbia University Press 2002.

⁵⁴ The late Berger (*The Desecularization of the World*, p. 2) notes that the world is as “furiously religious as it ever was”. Cf. Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/> [accessed: 16 V 2022].

⁵⁵ Also Rodney Stark (cf. *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World Is More Religious Than Ever*, Wilmington, DE: Isi Books 2015), e.g., affirms that the present global reality is more religious than ever before, whereas Ronald Inglehart (cf. *Religion’s Sudden Decline: What’s Causing it, and What Comes Next?*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press 2021) claims to recognize a sudden decline in religiosity from a contemporary global perspective. It should go without saying that such categorical judgments depend strongly on the researcher’s own personal view on the future predicament of religion (as Charles Taylor convincingly argues in *A Secular Age*, 431-432).

⁵⁶ Pope Benedict XVI speaks directly about the “age of nihilism” (Cf. J. Ratzinger, M. Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam: Europe, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, New York: Basic Books 2007).

transformation of the church in thought (philosophical and theological),⁵⁷ as well as structural reforms (including the reform of the Curia in Rome).⁵⁸ True to his creed,⁵⁹ the Pope considers this goal to be achievable “by initiating processes rather than possessing spaces” (EG 223).

According to one model of Pope Francis, the present Church resembles a polyhedron (EG 236; FT 144-145; 190; 215; 236). A polyhedron is a geometric body bounded by flat polygonal surfaces, “which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness” (EG 236). In contrast to a circle that is uniform and homogeneous, the polyhedron is a diverse and pluralistic reality capable of rearranging itself. The Church is able to step out of itself and meet the different peoples and cultures of our planet while still retaining its identity. The polyhedron model does not depend upon a straightforward trajectory for the religions and spiritualities of mankind. As we have seen above, while some predict the disappearance or “extinction” of a religion, sociologists and religious historians today are also diagnosing its return (something like “God’s revenge”). Clear empirical evidence suggests that God is more present in the public space today than we are used to in a post-Enlightenment context.

According to an African proverb, “everyone who has never left his village thinks his mother cooks the most delicious rice.” Whatever continent we come from, we tend to absolutize the perspective of our own culture (or worse, our nation) and we can easily convince ourselves that our own values are the only correct assessment of the world. But the West, while its historical experience is unique and valuable, hardly represents the whole globe. This is also true of the way we see religion. It is true that in many parts of the world today, religion’s attachment to institutions is declining, but experts are already divided on identifying the cause of this phenomenon. Some see it as merely a “European disease,” since the rest of the world (including North America) is much more religious. However, this view is not supported by the latest empirical data: the amount of so-called *nones* (those who, as do not profess to belong to any religion or denomination, although they may be interested in spirituality) in the United States is currently around 24 percent, and this proportion is even higher among young people.⁶⁰ Secularization continues not

⁵⁷ These include the four philosophical principles of Pope Francis: time take precedence over space (EG 222-225; LS 178); unity prevails over conflict (EG 226-230; LS 198); reality takes precedence over ideas (EG 231-233; LS 201); the whole take precedence over the part (EG 234-235; LS 141).

⁵⁸ In connection with the reform of the Curia in Rome, an apostolic constitution entitled *Predicate Evangelium* was recently published (March 19, 2022).

⁵⁹ Cf. A. Spadaro, *Interview with Pope Francis*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html [accessed: 16 V 2022].

⁶⁰ Cf. R.P. Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where Are Going*, Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press 2021; E. Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones*, New York: Oxford University Press 2016.

homogeneously, but in a “multiple” form,⁶¹ which also allows religion to “return,” at least as “spirituality” and as “identity.”⁶²

Would not identity-based “conservatism” be a solution to this problem? This approach is tempting for some ecclesiastical circles, if only because religious communities that follow a more traditional way of life (such as communities whose members consistently wear religious habits) tend to guard their devotees and in some places show an increase in numbers. In permissive and secularized Western societies, stable structures, clear rules, and the theological movements that support them have become attractive both inside and outside the Catholic Church. In the West, people want to maintain their cultural, political, and religious identities, so much so that the Church can become a vehicle to this end.⁶³

Pope Francis does not rely on identity groups in building the future of the Church. According to his view, as a Christian, the world should not be seen as a “land of damnation,” nor should it be confused with the land of promise. Rather, he suggests the path of “healing” (*cura*). Pope Bergoglio’s therapy is based on throwing ourselves into the world rather than retreating from it. The only acceptable, evangelical way to go out into the world is to return to the roots of the Christian message. This means that we do not see Christianity as a “doctrine” (a set of rules and formulas), nor as a mere moral teaching (civil religion), nor as a private devotion, but as good news in flesh-and-blood history, penetrating the fabric of concrete life.

The vision of Pope Francis is simple: to invite Christians to encounter Christ, and for Christians to help others do so as well. It is impossible to evangelize by forced conversion; the only authentic way is to evangelize “by attraction” (EG 131). The first Christians were considered fools for believing in the equality of people,

⁶¹ The literature on “multiple” forms of globalization and modernization (“multiple modernities”) is rapidly growing. One the consequences concerning secularization, see the Project of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Leipzig, *Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities*, <https://www.multiple-secularities.de/> [accessed: 16 V 2022].

⁶² On religion as identity, cf. A. Day (ed.), *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, Identity* (British Sociological Association. Sociology of Religion Study Group. Conference, 2006, Manchester), Burlington, VT – Aldershot: Ashgate 2008; M.A. Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative since 1789*, Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2004; P. Jonkers, O.J. Wiertz, *Religious Truth and Identity in an Age of Plurality*, London – New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2020. On religion as spirituality, cf. J.R. Carrette, R. King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, London – New York: Routledge 2005; P. Heelas et al., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, Malden, MA – Oxford, UK – Victoria (Australia): Blackwell 2005.

⁶³ At least, such (cultural-ethnic) identity and religiosity is suspected in those who occasionally emphasize the importance of Christianity but otherwise do not attend church and do not pray. Certain manifestations suggest that they want as many migrants as possible to perish in the Mediterranean Sea before reaching Europe (whereas they have typically not met any migrants in person). Cf. R. Micallef, *Fratellanza. Una virtù politica e religiosa*, Milano: San Paolo 2021, pp. 13-23. About the Pope’s teaching: Franciscus, *Lights on the Ways of Hope: Pope Francis Teaching on Migrants, Refugees and Human Trafficking*, Vatican City: Migrants Refugees 2018.

caring for the sick during the epidemics, respecting women, and not killing children under any circumstances. Their example was appealing, and gradually more and more people from the majority culture began to imitate them. Julián Carrón, former leader of the *Comunione e Liberazione* movement, writes: “Christianity ultimately spreads through envy: when they see that Christians’ lives are fuller, more intense because they are able to embrace what is different from us, and they love the other person. In this case, the desire is kindled that I should live like this too.”⁶⁴

It has never been easy to navigate the world, and in today’s turbulence it is perhaps harder than ever. We have identified and briefly analyzed four major trends related to the future of Christianity. The Church is not “dying,” it is just undergoing transformation. God is finding new ways through renewal in the Spirit. We have to deal with the Third World. We must prioritize the poor more than ever. From this, we conclude that the Western model of a cohesive minority Church is not the way of the future for the whole world; you can expect success at most in the West.

It would have been easy to single out just one of the models mentioned above and to designate it as the defining trend of the future. But this one-dimensional view – which is precisely the temptation of the heretics throughout history – would not do justice to the complexity of the present. Even if it is less popular, it is honest to admit that there are many contradictory tendencies in the world church; thus, finding our bearings among them requires great care and careful consideration. It is wise to rely on the pope’s opinion, since he is considering the matter from a broader perspective. The ultimate source of our trust is our conviction that the Holy Spirit leads the Church through him.

3. THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

We will now consider one final aspect, perhaps the most important. Based on present trends, what can be predicted within the Church about changes in prayer life and spirituality?

There is something wrong with the Church in the area of prayer today, at least according to the father of a major European spiritual master.⁶⁵ This statement is dramatic because, if we trust the teaching of the recent popes, teaching use how to pray is the most important task of the Church. Pope John Paul II expressed his conviction in this regard in 2001, affirming: “[the] training in holiness calls for

⁶⁴ Cf. J. Carrón, *Dov’è Dio? La fede Cristiana al tempo della grande incertezza. Una conversazione con Andrea Torielli*, Milano: Piemme 2017, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁵ Cf. F. Jalics, *Kontemplative Exerzitien. Eine Einführung in die kontemplative Lebenshaltung und in das Jesusgebet*, Würzburg: Echter 1994.

a Christian life distinguished above all in *the art of prayer*" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 32). Pope Francis wrote in his 2018 apostolic exhortation, "I do not believe in holiness without prayer" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 147). In this final section, we will try to capture the current status of prayer in the Church and offer some possible directions forward.

Our religious life, although not derived from it, is closely related to society and culture in general. Our prayer life has to do with our way of life; just as we each act in our own "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*), we also pray in it. Culture has an "embodied" relationship with spirituality and spiritual life. Just as changes in an individual's life affect their spiritual life, so too the cultural shifts of the Church (and its theology) affect its spirituality. Ours is a time of paradigm shifts, where basic human attitudes are changing: attitudes about rest and work, holiday and everyday life (for example, new concepts of "leisure" and "summer vacation"), night and day, space and time (for example, the use of electricity and air travel), the individual and the community, nature and the supernatural (for example, current issues of gender and secularization). When the old equilibria are broken, the way we live our spiritual life also changes. There is nothing extraordinary about this: prayer life is a dynamic reality that has always found new forms in course of history, both on an individual and community level. It is still undergoing an intense transformation today. Looking back historically (and, of course, at the cost of some simplification), we can say that in the last two thousand years, three great models have been developed in response to the question of how to radically follow Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

Saint Benedict and the Monastic Model. In ancient times, during the crisis of the fall of the Roman Empire, God gave the Church a great teacher in Saint Benedict. Benedict (c. 480–543/547) and the monks that followed him paved the way for Europe to bring Christianity to life by spreading the monastic model. If we accept the sources, applicants flowed *en masse* into the Benedictine monasteries from the very beginning. The medieval Church society was flourished in the spirit of the ideal taught here: *ora et labora* ("prayer and work"). The influence of the Benedictine congregation cannot be overstated: in its heyday, the 12th century, there were over two thousand monasteries in the Cluny monastery in Burgundy and four popes were elected from the monks (Gregory VII, Urban II, Pascal II and Urban V). The soul of the Benedictine community is the abbot, under whose leadership the monks sought personal sanctification through the recitation of the psalms (the breviary) in choir. They gathered in the chapel five times a day to spend as much time as possible in the direct worship of God, striving to remain in his presence even beyond these

⁶⁶ Useful manuals on the history of spirituality: L. Bouyer, J. Leclercq, *History of Christian Spirituality*, London: Burns & Oates 1963-1968 (in 2 bands); T.M. Gannon, *The Desert and the City: An Interpretation of the History of Christian Spirituality*, Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press 1969; U.T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*, Minneapolis, MN: The Seabury Press 1980; E. Pacho, *Storia della spiritualità moderna*, Roma: Teresianum 1984.

times. Physical work in the fields served only to enable the monks – role models of the perfect Christian life – to better carry out their prayer.

St. Francis and the model of begging orders. The Benedictine monasteries have emptied and re-filled throughout their history, but they never again reached the level of influence of Cluny Abbey. At the peak of the Middle Ages, God sent a new messenger, Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), to show the secularized Church the way out of its spiritual crisis. Francis, the *Poverello* (though he came from a bourgeois-merchant family), begged in the streets and began to rebuild a small church with his own hands. In the end, he rebuilt not just that small church, but the entire Church of Christ. His example attracted thousands of followers almost immediately, as well as a huge secular movement. As a result, a number of other begging orders were soon established on the foundations he laid, the most significant of which were the Dominicans. They restored the lost authority of the Church in the 12th century and worked against heretical movements in the 20th century. Francis' life answered to the most important challenges of church critics: he managed to neutralize the Bogomils, the Cathars and the Waldenses. His spiritual revolution, based on radical poverty, flooded the Church with the fresh scent of the gospel, a marked contrast with the old structures that smelled of comfort, decay, and stagnation. The Franciscans brought new life. For centuries, their model became the almost exclusive paradigm for the radical pursuit of Jesus Christ and experiencing true Christian religiosity (so much so that by the 15th century, both the previously established Carmelites and the Servites had become begging orders).

St. Ignatius and the Challenges of the New Age. At the beginning of the new age, the previous balances were upset again, and a radical socio-economic rearrangement commenced. This called for a new spiritual model. Although the Benedictines and Franciscans played a very important role in ancient and medieval times (a role which persists today), the singular importance of their approach somewhat declined. In the modern age, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was given the grace to answer the eternal question, "What does it mean to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ in a radical way today?" The world expanded in Ignatius' time. Great explorers set out – Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco de Gama, Christopher Columbus – and opened new sea voyages to Asia and added North and South America (*las Americas*) to the world map drawn in Europe. It is thus no coincidence that an order founded in Europe became the engine of the renewal of spirituality. The Jesuits stepped out of the walls of the monasteries and considered the entire world as their monastery. This was the condition for taking the gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It was both a continuation and a break with tradition: they followed in the footsteps of the same Lord, but now they chose to go into the world, living a "contemplative [life] in activity" (*contemplativus in actione*).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Useful basic literature on Jesuit Spirituality: G.P. Schnier (ed.), *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age*, Waterloo (Ontario): Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1984; D. Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to*

The New Spirituality: What remains, what changes? – The renewal of Church life proved essential because of the tectonic shifts in early-modern Western culture. Almost at the same time as the discovery of the “new world” (1492), the Protestant Reformation movement began (1526), and the first steam engine (1698) rumbled in as a harbinger of the Industrial Revolution. All of this produced crisis within the Church. The attractiveness of monastic life declined significantly in the changing socio-economic, cultural, and political conditions. This impacted the spiritual life of society: spirituality became more individualized, and the so-called *devotio moderna*, rooted in the culture of freedom, rooted and spread within culture. Ignatius’ soul resonated with these new challenges. We see this in his famous *Suscipe* prayer in the Book of *Spiritual Exercises*, which begins, “Take Lord, and receive all my liberty...” (Exx. 234). On the one hand, this prayer faithfully expresses the perennial, existential turn of the believer: the center of gravity of my existence must shift to God. On the other hand, it expresses something obviously new. Ignatius’ petition begins with “receive all my liberty;” only after this does he offer his “memory,” followed by “understanding,” and finally his “entire will.” This latter triplet reflects the traditional medieval image of man; liberty, on the other hand, is a modern development.⁶⁸ With this shift in anthropological emphasis, Jesuits see a way to be reunited with God today. Through it, they make the radical following of Jesus Christ a real possibility.

Initially, Ignatius’s followers, these “reformed priests,” were forced to work in the midst of significant opposition, as the *establishment* never too easily embraces new ideas. By the beginning of the modern age, however, St. Ignatius’ model had become the main trend: orders that did not follow his new practice were slowly regressing. For example, in almost every major city in medieval Europe, there was a large Dominican monastery, usually with hundreds of monks. Those same building complexes today hold a state-run school; only historians, historians of art, and local tour guides recount the original function of the building.

The spirituality of St. Ignatius, like that of Benedict and Francis, brought about a real spiritual revolution. Its essential components were the individual (not communal) recitation of the daily psalms, the “*examen*” practiced twice a day (a prayerful review of the past day and examination of conscience), and the practice of an annual retreat called the “spiritual exercises,” a period of reflection and intense individual

Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality, London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1990; D.L. Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?*, Chicago, IL: Loyola Press 2008; J.-C. Dhôtel, *La spiritualità ignaziana. Punti di riferimento*, Roma: AdP 2004.

⁶⁸ About the threefold Ignatian anthropology cf. M. Verheecke, *L’itinéraire du Chrétien d’Après les Exercices Spirituels d’Ignace de Loyola et ses Presupposés Anthropologiques*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre Cerfaux-Lefort 1984. Moreover, about the *Contemplation* para alcançar amor see R. Lafontaine, *L’originalité des Exercices d’Ignace de Loyola*, Paris: Lessius 2016, pp. 489-498; A. Demoustier, *Les Exercices spirituels de Saint Ignace de Loyola. Lecture et pratique d’un texte*, Paris: Éditions Facultés Jéuites de Paris 2006, pp. 435-440; S. Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio. Historia y Análisis*, Bilbao-Santander: Mensajero-Sal Terrae 1991, pp. 485-505.

prayer.⁶⁹ All of this was a brilliant innovation. While met with resistance by some Church circles, the orders that adopted the Ignatian model flourished successively over the centuries that followed. All this applies not only to those in the so-called “Ignatian spiritual family,” but also to the former monastic and begging orders, who adopted key elements of Ignatian spiritual practice. However, the changes in the world have not stopped. What is the road forward from here?

Today there is an extraordinary thirst for an authentic spirituality and prayer life. Strangely enough, non-Christians and ex-Christian are also looking for opportunities to learn to pray. The Church was not always be prepared to meet this need. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) commendably renewed Church structures but gave little guidance on the prayer life and the practical elements of Gospel transformation.⁷⁰ In recent times, as indicated above, popes perceived this deficiency, but their exhortations alone would not produce a miraculous change. The path of following Christ cannot be institutionally promoted, prescribed, or determined from above. The task rests with the saints of all ages, especially those who perceive the needs of their own time.

Since the 1960s, many people in the Western world have turned their attention to the East: countless people have flocked from Europe and North America to India and Japan to learn something about spirituality. This is symptomatic: something was felt to be missing (or rather, forgotten) in the West: the path of deep contemplation.⁷¹ The existing models no longer seemed to work properly. Is now the time for lay Christians to begin a conscious, deep, contemplative life? Karl Rahner, the renowned 20th-century Jesuit theologian, put it this way: “The Christian of the future will be either a mystic – that is, one who has experienced something – or will not exist at all.”⁷² St. Ignatius of Loyola has left behind a uniquely adaptable institution:

⁶⁹ Pope Paul IV (1476-1559) tried to impose on the Society of Jesus the recitation of the “liturgy of the hours” (officium) “in choir,” as it was habitual for other religious orders of that time. Saint Ignatius respected the papal order, but after the death of the Pontiff, the Society returned to his revolutionary idea and prescribed to his fellow Jesuits to pray the breviary individually (cf. J.W. O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press 1993, p. 161). The “examen particulare” and the “examen generale” is prescribed by Saint Ignatius in his Book of Spiritual Exercises (Exx. 24-43). The yearly 8-day-retreat became compulsory in the Society of Jesus only in 1608, as the IV. General Congregation, under Claudio Acquaviva as Superior general of the Society of Jesus, prescribed it. Cf. M. Viller, M. Olphe-Galliard, *Aux origines de la retraite annuelle. Son institution au sein de la Compagnie de Jésus*, “Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique” 15 (1934), pp. 3-33.

⁷⁰ About prayer in the official texts of Vatican II we find only some scattered references (LG 4; 10; 29; 37; 40; 42; 59; 69; DV 10; 15; PO 5; 6; 9; UR 6-8; OT 4; GS 49; AG 25; 42 etc.), more detailed references are in the constitution on the sacred liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC 6; 7; 12; 24; 27; 33; 36; 41; 48; 53-54; 109, etc.).

⁷¹ Cf. the description of the situation by T. Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, London: Bloomsbury 2019; T. Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation*, New York – Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 1999.

⁷² Cf. K. Rahner, *Christian Living Formerly and Today*, in: K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7, Freiburg: Herder & Herder 1971, p. 15.

Jesuit spirituality gives it flexibility, an ability to change, to renew itself. It yields to creativity. Falling numbers testify to a spiritual crisis, as do the sexual scandals shaking the Church today. Renewal begins with each one of us, in trust that a life of deep prayer united with Christ will radiate irresistibly to others. It renews the face of the earth (cf. Ps 104:30).

We look to the future not so much to predict it accurately, but to shape it – we mentioned this at the outset of our investigation. In light of this, we close this study with a final provocation. “*Dem Glauben Zukunft geben*” [Give a future to faith]: this was the title given by Reinhard Marx (then the Archbishop of Munich-Freising) to his 2008 diocesan forum on the future. 126 delegates worked for two years to gather suggestions from parishes. After an incredible amount of paperwork, the delegates submitted elaborated proposals to the archbishop. The draft articulated how to carry out “modern pastoral care” (*zeitgemäße Seelsorge*). Numerous proposals were made for structural reforms, personnel changes, and rethinking diocesan priorities.

No one could question the legitimacy of this well-intentioned initiative, but did they ask the correct question at the outset? From the title of the initiative, it seems that they did not. Is it really *we* who “give a future to faith?” Is it not the other way around, the *faith gives us a future*? All our initiatives fade away outside of this framework. In theology, much depends on the questions we ask. Today, in an age of secularization and the “ethic of authenticity,”⁷³ this is especially the case.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AG – Vatican II, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* (1965)
- DV – Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965)
- EG – Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)
- FT – Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020)
- GS – Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (1965)
- LS – Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015)
- OT – Vatican II, The Decree on Priestly Training *Optatam Totius* (1965)
- PO – Vatican II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965)
- SC – Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963)
- UR – Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964)
- VG – Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (2018)

⁷³ Cf. Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press 1991.

SEKULARYZACJA, MODELE KOŚCIOŁA I DUCHOWOŚCI:
PRZYSZŁOŚĆ KOŚCIOŁA W ŚWIETLE WSPÓŁCZESNYCH TRENDÓW

Abstrakt

Niniejsze opracowanie ma ambitny cel: przewidzieć przyszłość Kościoła. Jak ktoś może podjąć się takiego przedsięwzięcia? Ponieważ jedyną rzeczą, którą wiemy na pewno o historii, jest *omnia aliter*: wszystko będzie inne, niż sobie wyobrażaliśmy. Jednak takie przedsięwzięcie nie jest tak niemożliwe, jak się wydaje. Podążając śladami krytyków literackich, ekonomistów, historyków, politologów, filozofów i teologów, szkicujemy niektóre z najbardziej prawdopodobnych zmian w świetle już zaobserwowanych tendencji, posługując się najlepszą dostępną hermeneutyką. Po pierwsze, interpretujemy najważniejszy obecnie trend globalny: sekularyzację (rozdział 1). Po drugie, przedstawiamy i oceniamy aktualne modele przyszłości Kościoła, zwracając szczególną uwagę na Magisterium papieża Franciszka (część 2). Wreszcie, przewidujemy prawdopodobny rozwój wydarzeń w dziedzinie duchowości (część 3). Starając się pisać naukowo o tematach futurystycznych, mamy świadomość, że w przyszłość patrzy się nie tyle po to, by ją dokładnie przewidzieć, ile po to, by ją kształtować.

Słowa kluczowe: sekularyzacja, duchowość, przyszłość Kościoła, papież Franciszek, trendy, modele Kościoła.

SECULARIZATION, MODELS OF THE CHURCH AND SPIRITUALITY:
THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S TRENDS

Abstract

This paper has an ambitious aim: to predict the future of the Church. How can anyone undertake such an enterprise since the one thing we know for certain about history is *omnia aliter*, that is, everything will be different than we once imagined. However, such a project is not as unfeasible as it seems. In the footsteps of literary critics, economists, historians, political scientists, philosophers, and theologians, we sketch some of the most likely shifts in the light of already-observable trends using the finest hermeneutics available. First, we interpret the most significant global trend today: secularization (sections 1). Second, we present and evaluate current models for the future of the Church, paying particular attention to the Magisterium of Pope Francis (sections 2). Finally, we predict likely developments in the area of spirituality (sections 3). In setting out to write academically about futuristic topics, we are aware that one looks to the future not so much to predict it accurately, as to shape it.

Keywords: Secularization, Spirituality, Future of the Church, Pope Francis, Trends, Models of the Church.

SÄKULARISIERUNG, MODELLE DER KIRCHE UND SPIRITUALITÄT:
DIE ZUKUNFT DER KIRCHE IM LICHT DER GEGENWÄRTIGEN TRENDS

Abstrakt

Diese Studie hat ein ehrgeiziges Ziel: Sie soll die Zukunft der Kirche voraussagen. Wie kann jemand ein solches Unterfangen in Angriff nehmen? Denn das Einzige, was wir mit Sicherheit über die Geschichte wissen, ist *omnia aliter*: Alles wird anders sein, als wir es uns vorgestellt haben. Doch ein solches Unterfangen ist nicht so unmöglich, wie es scheint. Auf den Spuren von Literaturkritikern, Ökonomen, Historikern, Politikwissenschaftlern, Philosophen und Theologen können wir in unserer Zeit einige wahrscheinliche Szenarien im Licht von bereits beobachteten Tendenzen skizzieren, wobei die beste verfügbare Hermeneutik anzuwenden ist. Zunächst interpretieren wir den wichtigsten aktuellen globalen Trend: die Säkularisierung (Kapitel 1). Zweitens stellen wir aktuelle Modelle für die Zukunft der Kirche vor und bewerten sie, wobei wir dem Lehramt von Papst Franziskus eine besondere Aufmerksamkeit schenken (Abschnitt 2). Schließlich geben wir einen Ausblick auf die zu erwartenden Entwicklungen im Bereich der Spiritualität (Teil 3). Wenn wir versuchen, wissenschaftlich über futuristische Themen zu schreiben, sind wir uns bewusst, dass man nicht so sehr in die Zukunft schaut, um sie genau vorauszusagen, sondern um sie zu gestalten.

Schlüsselwörter: Säkularisierung, Spiritualität, Zukunft der Kirche, Papst Franziskus, Trends, Kirchenmodelle.

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Ferenc Patsch – Jesuit priest and member of the Hungarian Province of the Society of Jesus. He holds a Licentiate degree in philosophy and a Doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He served in Hungary for 5 years as Associate Lecturer at the Sapientia College of Religious Orders and as Editor-in-Chief of the journal of the same College, and as Visiting Lecturer at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University of Budapest. He also taught at Hekima College, the Jesuit's Theology Faculty in Nairobi (Kenya), in the Instituto Superior Pedro Francisco Bonó in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), and at the John Felice Rome Center (a campus of Loyola University Chicago in Rome). Since 2012, he has been teaching theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome (since 2018 Professor Extraordinarius) where he served also as Chair of the Department of Fundamental Theology (2018-2021). Fields of interest and research: the theology of religions, philosophical hermeneutics, and fundamental theology. Main publications: Patsch Ferenc, *Az út befelé vezet. Spirituális kérdésekről személyes hangon* (2021); *Égető kérdések, katolikus válaszok* (2019); *Megtalálni Istent mindenben. A világ jezsuita szemmel (Válogatott írások)* (2017); *Hermeneutika. A filozófia jövője és a jövő teológiája I.* (2016). Email: patsch@unigre.it.