

Book Reviews

International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria*, Paulines, (Vatican Documents 105), Pasay City (Philippines), 2013, 92 p.

This document of the International Theological Commission has a long period of preparation. From 2004-2008, a sub-commission presided by Santiago del Cura Elena was working on it, without concrete results. Later, another sub-commission headed by Paul McPartlan, produced the present document approved by Cardinal Levada in 2011 and published in 2013. Even if the document is not so recent, it should be good to have a summary, especially for theological schools.

We observe in the document abundant quotations from the Scripture and from the documents of Vatican II, for which *Verbum Dei* has a place of honor. The other recent documents of the Magisterium are present: post-synodal exhortations, encyclicals and speeches of the Popes, until Benedict XVI. There are often allusions to the documents of this Theological Commission. Among other sources we find Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, but also some others like Thomas à Kempis, Cano, Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux, Johan Adam Möler, J. H. Newman, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac. However, in general, the document is discrete for the explicit quotations, and the affirmations are rather general. The structure is simple: Introduction, three chapters and Conclusion.

A short "Introduction" (pp. 7-10) shows the abundant theological production after Vatican II, and marks the "fragmentation" of this period. However, the document points to the unity and apostolicity of theology in order to understand correctly the plurality of theology.

The title of the first Chapter is “Listening to the Word of God”. It will give us the framework of the document. The source of Catholic Theology is the Word of God. In this sense, we find a distinction that became important in our time: “the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book”. In fact it arrives today to affirm that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are “religions of the book”.

“Christianity is the “religion of the word of God”, not of a “written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word” (*Verbum Domini* 7). The gospel of God is fundamentally testified by the sacred Scripture of both Old and New Testament” (cf. *Dei Verbum* 7, 11, 16). The Holy Spirit inspires not only the authors, but also the readers. A second important step is the Faith, as the response to God’s Word. The text insists: the “obedience of faith” (Rm 1: 5) is personal and involves the “full submission of the intellect and will to the God who reveals” (*Dei Verbum* 5). Faith is not “irrational”, but gives rise to the “spiritual worship” (Rm 12: 1-2: *logiké latreía*).

The document distinguishes the two classical aspects of faith: *fides qua* and *fides quae*. That means the act of belief or trust and also that which is believed or confessed. Faith is personal and communitarian, and is expressed in “creeds” since the origin of the Church.

“Heretical” interpretation of the faith is opposed to the Apostolic Tradition. Following the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the text underlines the “obstination” as the mark of the heretical.

Finally the chapter focuses on theology itself. The explanation is simple: theology is the understanding of the faith. We find the classical formulas of Augustine – “*intellectus fidei*” – and of Anselm – “*Fides quaerens intellectum*” -.

Chapter 2: “Abiding in the Communion of the Church”. In the short introduction to the chapter, I

appreciate the allusion to the classic work of Cano about the *loci theologici*. The document gives in footnote the ten *loci*, which is not common.

We underline here some aspects of the theology according to the document. First should be the conciliar affirmation that Scripture must be the “soul” of theology. We note here the allusions to the document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, from the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993) that is always very useful. The simple explanation of the “methods” in exegesis is correct, and the text includes the famous medieval synthesis: “*gesta, allegoria, moralis* and *anagogia*”. The study of Henri de Lubac on “Medieval Exegesis” is still very valuable. I think there is much to do in this sense in order to give biblical penetration in every treatise of Theology. We find here an allusion to the Prologue of the *Breviloquium* of Bonaventure and some clear quotations from Saint Thomas.

Another long paragraph deals with Apostolic Tradition. It is one of the major points of the Catholic Theology. The document extends the classical formula *lex orandi fiat lex credenda*, and adds *lex vivendi*. According to the vision of *Dei Verbum* (7-8), the Tradition presented like “something living and vital, an ongoing process in which the unity of faith finds expression in the variety of languages and the diversity of cultures. Tradition is growing in every generation.

There is a paragraph for the Fathers, whose importance for the theology was rediscovered by Vatican II. Patrology has entered more and more in the programs and manuals on it are not lacking.

The testimony of Councils, since the first apostolic gathering in Jerusalem (Act 15) is also essential. We note that the text gives the list of the first seven Councils, from Nicaea I to Nicaea II, which are the commonly accepted Councils by Orient and Occident. Good

orientation about the notion of “dogma”, necessary today to avoid misunderstanding of it.

The importance and use of the Magisterium appear in the core of this chapter. Because of the apostolicity of the Tradition and the ecclesiality of the theology, the link with the Magisterium, pontifical and episcopal appears essential. That should be a crucial aspect of the difference between Protestant and Catholic Theology, but the document avoids this kind of confrontations.

The text follows *Dei Verbum* 9. Another important paragraph deals with the subject of “Tradition and traditions”, according to the work of Congar. There is question of popular “traditions” and the criteria to accept or reject. In the footnote 68 there is allusion to the document “Scripture, Tradition and Traditions” of the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order (1964).

Another sensitive sub-chapter deals with the *sensus fidelium*. It is “the supernatural appreciation of the faith of the whole people”. Here the collaboration between theologians and pastors appears very suitable. (The document does not use the classical formula “infallibilitas in credendo”, but quotes Saint Augustine).

The relationship between theologians and Magisterium is sometimes a controversial point. The document alludes to other documents of the Commission and also of the Doctrine of the faith (*Donum Veritatis*). The text fosters the collaboration which is necessary in both senses. Following a suggestion of Thomas Aquinas, it is allusion to the “magisterium theologorum”, to be in coordination with the “magisterium episcoporum” and of the Pope. A true exegesis of the documents is necessary to understand the different levels of authority.

The document deals also with the delicate point of “dissent” in theology, so important today¹. A radical

¹ Remember the reactions to the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Paul VI. Criticism toward some Pope Francis’ position e.g. on *Amoris*

“dissent” should be not Catholic, instead investigation and questioning could be a true collaboration with the Magisterium. Tensions will exist, and the document quotes Blessed Newman. The freedom of theologians is to integrate scientific and confessional theology in the horizon of the design of God.

Another original point of *Theology Today* is about “the company of theologians”. In fact, this is an evident aspect of the theological work in present times. Collaboration in research in publications, seminars and conferences strengthen awareness and appreciation of colleagues “should be cultivated”, even with specialists on non-theological matters. Other interesting aspects are: the increasing number of lay theologians, men and women, the modern possibilities of medieval *disputatio*, and the ecumenical dialogue. The text encourages the “dialogue with the world”, the “historicity” of the theology and the ongoing task of inculturation. However, there is not a direct paragraph on dialogue with other religions which seems one of the urgent tasks of theology today.

Chapter 3: “Giving an Account of the Truth of God”. This last chapter “considers essential aspects of theology as a rational human endeavor”, namely three: rationality of theology, unity of theology in a plurality of methods and disciplines, and science and wisdom.

The first sub-chapter considers some aspects of the history of theology. First, the scientific character of theology is explained in the light of the truth of Revelation. The document defends this scientific character against the “univocal view of science” we find in modern statements. (Anselm, Augustine and *Fides et Ratio* help us in this endeavor). The historical development, though short, is very interesting. The itinerary is instructive: the Fathers of the Church

declaring the difference between faith and mythical and political theology; the Eastern Fathers affirming the truth of the *Logos*; the contribution of Boethius; the scholasticism with the massive use of Aristotle (Thomas Aquinas) but in spirit of *sacra pagina*; the reaction against the excessive rationalistic theology (Thomas à Kempis), the Catholic theology fighting against Reformation theologians (Trent and post-tridentine theology), the new attack of Enlightenment and the present post-modernism². There is however no allusion to the extraordinary flourishing of theology in all its specialties around Vatican II – Bible, Patristics, Systematic Theology, especially in its historical aspects, Moral, and Pastoral. The answer to the post-modernism is correct, but may be too short. The purpose should be “to revitalize an authentic metaphysics”. In general, the text points to *Fides et Ratio* like a good way for the present relationship between philosophy and theology.

“The unity of theology in a plurality of methods and disciplines” takes a great place in the document (10 pages). We find there some quotations of Aquinas, and the idea of “*Reductio ad Mysterium*” which is rather Franciscan (St. Bonaventure). It should be the Mystery of God and the Mystery of the History of Salvation. The unity of theology was very clear for the Fathers and Scholastics. In modern times, the different disciplines demanded different methods, and it appeared the plural “theologies” for the different authors, periods and cultures. The document does not try to do a classification of the different “theologies” of today, but describes some factors to explain this phenomenon. However, to avoid the danger of relativism or heterodoxy it points to the

² We think what is lacking is an allusion to the “positive theology” different from “scholastic theology” (cf. Petavius and Thomassin). The reaction against Enlightenment was not only apologetic (cf. J.A. Möller and M. Scheeben).

necessity of emphasizing the nature of theology as *Scientia fidei* or *Scientia Dei*. In fact, there is a “common theological tradition” – “memory in theology”. Interdisciplinary collaboration is indispensable. Philosophy and human sciences can be used by theology but they cannot impose their “magisterium”. We observe also in philosophy today an evident fragmentation and pluralism. May be, to serve theology today, the more useful school could be “phenomenology” (cf. John Paul II as philosopher). There is also an interesting collaboration with the religious sciences and studies, beyond past controversies, in respect of different approaches. The presence of theology in public academic instances should be suitable.

The last sub-chapter is about “Science and Wisdom”³. Through the Bible, Old and New Testament, and Fathers, the text tries to explain the unifying Wisdom as the final goal of theology in relationship with spirituality. Nevertheless, there is distinction between “theological wisdom” and “mystical wisdom”, following Thomas Aquinas. “The intellectual contemplation which results from the rational labor of the theologian is truly a wisdom”. The “mystical wisdom” instead is “a gift of the Holy Spirit which comes from union with God in love”. Hence the celebrated expression of Pseudo-Dionysius: “*pati divina*” and other authors like Maximus the Confessor and Richard of St. Victor. We find in the document an interesting note about “private revelations” (n. 152), a case in which theology gives interpretation to the mystic phenomena. Teresa of Avila recommended this collaboration. There are interesting paragraphs on the spirituality of the theologian and his capacity to be in contact with other religious “wisdoms”; today, this is necessary⁴. It does not lack paragraphs on *negative* and

³ Cf. the classical work of Maritain *Science et Sagesse*.

⁴ In Manila, the center of diffusion of Buddhism is called “Wisdom

positive theology, and on *ekstasis*, *kenosis* and *theosis*. We note that in the recent proclamation of doctors of the Church are women with mystical experience: Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux.

Finally, in conclusion we have a praise for the theological vocation and its character of doxology and thanksgiving.

We have in this document of the International Theological Commission *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* a simple presentation of the nature of theology as *Scientia fidei* and *scientia Dei*, so rich in the biblical references, very rooted in the tradition of the Church, and with a global vision of today's situation. A detailed description of schools and persons, with reference to the institutions, is however avoided following the style of official documents.

What is lacking is a panorama of the theology that produced the documents of Vatican II, in a moment of abundant theologians of all specialties. Here, we note that the little document *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican II, has taken greater importance today: the contact with other religions demands a new theological reflection to understand them in the light of Revelation, and to insert their presence and meaning in the light of the History of Salvation in Christ. The crucial problems today come from the field of Moral Theology and Bioethics. This was not remarked enough in the text.

But the document is a valid instrument for Catholic theologians and a kind of synthesis of Fundamental Theology that can be used for the introductory courses to the theological studies.

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POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Paulines, Pasay City, 2016(7), 188 p.

Even if Pope Francis published the Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* on 29 Jun 2013 we discover in it the background of Pope Benedict XVI in content and in quotations. So we can consider *Evangelii Gaudium* the first personal document of Pope Francis. In some sense it is also a heritage of the previous Pope, since it is the exhortation after the Episcopal Synod of 2012 on *The New Evangelization for the transmission of Christian Faith*, but style, quotations and orientations are quite from the present Pope. The document in addition is very consistent (188 pages). Even if the official edition is in Latin, we easily discover the Spanish original and of course the personal hand of the Argentinian Pope. We can consider it the true first document, a kind of “program for the Pontificate”. In comparison with other posterior documents, like *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) that are more specific, *Evangelii Gaudium* touches the core of the Christian Faith.

The matter is distributed in 5 chapters with an introduction. The titles are meaningful and give us the structure of the message: 1. “The Church’s Missionary Transformation; 2. “Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment; 3. The Proclamation of the Gospel; 4. “The Social Dimension of Evangelization”; 5. “Spirit-filled Evangelizers”.

About quotations, in addition to the Scriptural allusions, we find some Fathers of the Church – Irenaeus, Ambrose. Chrysostom, Augustine...) – and St. Thomas

Aquinas, but also St. Francis, Isaac of Stella, à Kempis, Peter Faber, Thérèse of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, Blessed Newman, Georges Bernanos, Henri de Lubac, and Guardini, who is a beloved author of Pope Francis. We find also authors from Latin America like I. Quiles SJ (note 183), V.M. Fernández (note 207), the document about Guadalupe – *Nican Mopoua* – and *Aparecida*, document of CELAM especially beloved by Pope Francis. We note of course the presence of Vatican II and the recent Popes. Among them the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI is often quoted, but also different documents of St. John Paul II and so many of Benedict XVI. Pope Francis loves also to mention pastoral documents of the Conferences of Bishops of different countries.

About the content, we point to the original title of the Letter, i.e. *Evangelii Gaudium*. In fact, the Pope gives a synthesis of biblical references of the O.T. and the N.T. about “Joy”, based also on Paul VI and Benedict XVI. But he underlines also the joy of evangelizing and the eternal newness of the Gospel. Only in the paragraph 14 the Pope alludes to the “New Evangelization” that was the theme of the Synod. In fact we will find some allusions to the “propositions”, but in general the letter of Francis seems a little independent and looks like more personal, with acknowledgment of limitations. In this sense we want to quote some paragraphs that seem to me witness the way in which Francis conceives his papal magisterium:

“I have chosen not to explore these many questions which call for further reflection and study. Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to

promote a sound “decentralization” (n. 16).

Francis intends to develop especially: the missionary outreach of the Church; the temptations of pastoral workers; the entire People of God which evangelizes; the homily; the poor in society; dialogue within the society and the spiritual motivation for mission (n. 17).

In the **first chapter**, Francis notes the missionary transformation of the Church – “state of mission” – and renews the missionary option for all categories of the People of God. He prevents the danger of distortion and following a suggestion of *Unitatis Redintegratio* (n. 11) he stresses the “heart” of the Gospel and the harmony of Christian message. In a very personal paragraph, Francis admits the “pluralism”, because of the social sciences, philosophy, theology and pastoral practices and adds:

“For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion. But in fact such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel” (n. 40).

The Pope quotes here St. Thomas Aquinas and recalls the famous discourse of opening of Vatican II of Pope John XXIII. Following these ideas, Francis exposes the possibility of misunderstanding a very orthodox discourse because of the cultural changes in the meaning of words and expressions. Anyway, we cannot forget a certain obscurity of the faith (n. 42).

The Pope likes to insist in the quality of the witness and the reexamination of customs. Quoting Thomas and Augustine, he points to the “moderation” and in the way of accompaniment the souls toward the faith in Christ. That should be a “missionary heart”. That is the last paragraph of this first chapter and gives us the true vision of Francis. The Church must be “a Mother with an Open Heart” (n. 46-49). Let us underline the application

the Pope notes about Eucharist: “The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (n. 47). We will find this principle in other documents of Francis. Hence, the openness to the poor and the sick and the warning against “false sense of security” in a kind of structural closeness.

With the **second chapter** – “Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment” – we enter in a kind of panorama of the present world according to the mind of the Pope. The depiction is not systematic. It should not be the task of the Pope (n. 51). So, we will focus only on some aspects of the present culture in the document.

In general, the context seems “overloaded”, hence the need for discernment in Spirit, and the scrutiny of the “signs of times” in order to discover the factors that weaken the missionary renewal and threaten the dignity of God’s people. Among them, and beyond the advances of our time, we find fear and desperation, violence and inequality, economy of exclusion, and marginalization. Francis attacks the optimism of “free market” and the “culture of prosperity”, with a new idolatry of the money (n. 55-56). He excludes a “financial system which rules rather than serves” and spawns violence, and denies the ideology of the “end of history”, (cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of the History*, 1992; n.59), and the career of arms. The Pope criticizes even a false proposal of “education” in a very personal paragraph:

“Some simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poorer countries themselves for their troubles; indulging in unwarranted generalizations, they claim that the solution is an “education” that would tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless. All this becomes more exasperating for the marginalized in the light of the widespread and deeply rooted corruption

found in many countries – in their governments, businesses and institutions – whatever the political ideology of their leaders” (n. 60).

About “cultural challenges” Francis signals the reaction against all kinds of totalitarian Ideologies that lead to a subjective truth, but also the globalization as deterioration of cultural roots (Africa and Asia). The proliferation of “religious movements” is understandable in the context of the secularization of the faith. The Catholic Church by its doctrine and institutions – schools and universities – and through marriage and familiar life beyond “mere emotional satisfaction” is acting to overcome the wound of individualism of our postmodern era (n. 66-67).

For inculturation of the faith, the Pope uses an interesting expression, “Christian humanism” and the defense of “evangelized popular culture” in which we guess his Latin America experience. He promotes “new processes for evangelizing culture” taking the “popular piety” as the starting point. However, he recognizes a breakdown in the transmission of faith to the young, and gives a list of possible factors (n. 70).

A long section of this chapter is about “challenges from urban cultures”. In this sense, since several years the Pontifical Counsel for Culture has promoted the “Court of Gentiles”. Francis rejects radical pessimism – God is dwelling there -. “A completely new culture has come to life and continues to grow in the cities” (n. 73). The description deserves to be meditated (n. 74-75). But Francis describes also the “temptations faced by Pastoral Workers” like individualism, inferiority complex, practical relativism, tiredness, illness, unrealistic projects, lack of patience, dream of immediate success and pragmatism. It is necessary to avoid spiritual worldliness, seeking for one’s glory, neo-pelagianism, authoritarian elitism, prestige, business mind,

corruption, and clericalism as a false meaning of priesthood. It is not lacking a call for youth apostolate and vocations promotion.

After the context of evangelization today, the **third chapter**, “The Proclamation of the Gospel” is the center of the exhortation. The notion is taken from *Ecclesia in Asia* (n.19): “evangelization (is) the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The salient points of the exposition are: evangelization is the task of the entire People of God; the true initiative comes from God; the Church is called to convoke all and “must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel” (n. 114).

Francis asserts in a positive way the diversity of cultures receiving the Gospel, their enrichment, and the new aspects of revelation that the cultures show. The original thought of the Pope is especially expressed in this paragraph:

“We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as mono-cultural and monotonous. While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them, its content is transcultural. Hence in the evangelization of the new cultures, or cultures which have not received the Christian message, it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form. No matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel. The message that we proclaim always has a certain cultural dress, but we in the Church can sometimes fall into a needless hallowing of our culture, and thus show more fanaticism than true evangelizing zeal” (n. 117).

Hence Pope Francis recalls the *sensus fidei* of faithful

and the *infallibilitas in credendo*, since the new evangelization must be not the exclusive task of professionals, but the part of each of the baptized. So “every Christian is a missionary” (n. 119-120). Therefore, the document explains the importance of popular piety and its task in the new evangelization. In all this section we observe abundant quotations of the exhortations of St. John Paul II after the continental Synods, and the document *Aparecida* of CELAM (2007). In fact, there is a “people’s mysticism” expressed in gestures with a powerful effect in evangelization.

The document alludes also to the “person to person” evangelization – informal conversations -, when testimony has special importance, without fixed formulations learned by heart, evangelization being a “slow process” of inculturation. It is necessary to remember the different ecclesial charisms of evangelization, in the unity of Spirit. Lastly, the Pope points to the “professional circles”, the “creative apologetics”, sciences, schools and universities as tools of evangelization.

We enter in a long section II of this chapter (135-144), consecrated to the **homily**. Here the long pastoral experience of Francis appears in an evident way. He would like to give concrete orientations to the preachers. Homily is the touchstone for a pastor but first of all “an intense and happy experience of the Spirit” (n. 135). The normal context is the “Eucharistic assembly”, and its aim is not a meditation or catechesis. It must be brief, and not merely read. It is “a mother’s conversation”, as possible in mother tongue and culture with joy. Francis prolongs his considerations with another sub-chapter “Preparing to Preach”. It means: attention to the biblical text, reverence for the truth, study and patience to speak of the God whom we love and wishes to speak to us (n. 146). In a true biblical spirit, we must prevent “erroneous or partial interpretations which would contradict other

teachings of the same Scriptures. But it does not mean that we can weaken the distinct and specific emphasis of a text which we are called to preach. One of the defects of a tedious and ineffectual preaching is precisely its inability to transmit the intrinsic power of the text which has been proclaimed" (n. 148). We have to personalize the Word with prayer, hence the famous formula of Thomas Aquinas: *Contemplata aliis tradere*. Therefore, the recommend-ation of *lectio divina* with an ear also to the people. Francis is nuanced in the use of ordinary human experience that he approves and the last news that are not suitable for the preaching. Among the "resources" Francis quotes Paul VI: "The faithful ... expect much from preaching, and will greatly benefit from it, provided that it is simple, clear, direct, and well-adapted" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 33), and to use ordinary language, logical progression, and general positive target.

The last sub-chapter is about "evangelization and the deeper understanding of the Kerygma". This new step of evangelization should not be first in terms of doctrinal formation, but in a personal answer through commandments and virtues: a kind of "mystagogical catechesis" that includes moral life and liturgical signs. That should be the "way of beauty" (*via pulchritudinis*), in which all dimensions of the person are considered, with a "new language of parables" and the attractiveness of the ideal of a life of wisdom. Francis inserts here the "personal accompaniment in processes of growth", with prudence and patience, listening the person, discovering his/her "contrary inclinations", introducing "step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery" (John Paul II).

The last paragraph of this chapter comes back to the Scriptures as the true source of evangelization, hence the exhortation for a "serious, ongoing study of the Bible" (n. 175).

The **fourth chapter** is about “The Social Dimension of Evangelization”, and deals with the repercussions of the kerygma in the society. The Holy Spirit is the source of divine creativity for all problems. Benedict XVI gave the *Motu Proprio Intima Ecclesiae Natura* (2012) about the “service of charity” as a constituent element of the Church’s mission, in her universality: “Nothing human can be alien to it” (n.181). Francis recommends the study of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, and, with Paul VI, avoids to give solutions with universal validity. He restrains his purpose to these two points: the inclusion of the poor in society and peace and social dialogue. He recalls the biblical references of the liberation of the poor and insists in “solidarity”, to eliminate the structural causes of poverty, since all peoples should be artisans of their destiny. In a specific claim that means, education, access to health care and employment (n. 192). Quoting the document, Francis says: “Defenders of orthodoxy are sometimes accused of passivity, indulgence, or culpable complicity regarding the intolerable situations of injustice and the political regimes which prolong them” (n. 194). He offers a synthesis of biblical theology of almsgiving. However it is not “unruly activism”, since the true love is always “contemplative” (Thomas Aquinas). Another original observation of Francis is the lack of spiritual care as the worse discrimination of the poor that deserves a “preferential religious care” (n. 200). He writes:

“No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from

concern for the poor and for social justice: “Spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty are required of everyone (*Libertatis Nuntius*, n. 18). I fear that these words may give rise to commentary or discussion with no real practical effect. That being said, I trust in the openness and readiness of all Christians, and I ask you to seek, as community, creative ways of accepting this renewed call” (n. 201).

We have also some paragraphs on the economy and the distribution of income. We observe here a very personal style of the discourse. The Pope accuses many political and economic speeches of rhetoric, “lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development” (n. 203). But he praises the “vocation” of business men and politics and ask the Lord for a new political and economic mindset. He rejects the possible accusation of “populism” and apologizes for his words. To understand the background of this text, it should be good to follow the propositions of the World Economic Forum and see the main World Social Science Forum. View these words of Francis about migrants:

“I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralyzing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favor the recognition of others!” (n. 210).

Francis alludes to all the “victims” of our world: human trafficking and abortion. No “modernization” or “progress” against the dignity of human life. Finally, the Pope recalls the ecological conversion.

The third part of the chapter is consecrated to “The

Common Good and Peace in Society.” Behold the main concerns of the Pope: time is greater than space; to work slowly but surely; accept the tension between fullness and limitation; initiating processes rather than possessing spaces – Francis quotes here the work of R. Guardini *The End and of the Modern World* - ; unity prevails over conflict; communion amid disagreement; higher plan to preserves what is valid an useful on both sides – finally Christ -; the Spirit can harmonize every diversity; realities are more important than ideas; we will not want to reinvent the Gospel; the whole is greater than the part – polyhedron -; the genius of each people receives the entire Gospel, that has an intrinsic principle of totality.

The exhortation includes a section on “Social Dialogue as a Contribution to Peace”: Dialogue between faith, reason and science; ecumenical dialogue; relations with Judaism; interreligious dialogue, which is not easy syncretism, and focus especially Islam, with a final paragraph on “Social dialogue in a context of religious freedom” with intellectuals and politicians, in a healthy pluralism. In this sense the Pope recalls the “new Areopagi” and the specific attempt of the “Court of the Gentiles” promoted by the Pontifical Council of Culture, under Cardinal Ravasi.

The **final short chapter** of this exhortation is on “Spirit-Filled Evangelizers”. It is a very personal chapter: “How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction” (n. 261). So the Pope invoke the Holy Spirit. Following a proposition of the Synod, Francis says: “What is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity” (*Proposition* 36). For him, every period of history is marked by the presence of sin and its consequences, and

present time is not worse, it is “different”. Let us imitate the saints who knew how to answer to their time obstacles. The first step was a “personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus”. Therefore, “we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life” (n. 264). We note a long quotation of the encyclical of John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio*, in which this saint Pope points to the unconscious expectation in individuals of knowing the truth about God. The missionary is convinced of responding to that expectation.

We guess the heart of Francis in these affirmations:

“It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, no the same thing to hear his word as not know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights” (n. 266).

First intention of evangelization should be always the greater glory of the Father. We must be at the heart of the God’s People. The Pope insists in the power of tenderness giving reasons for hope. The evangelizer has to preach the Gospel *sine glossa*, typical formula of St. Francis to avoid the complicated hermeneutics of the text. The mission must become our very self, and cap-able to see in every human being a person created by God and redeemed by the blood of his Son. That should be the perception of the “mysterious working of the risen Christ and his Spirit” against the empty selfish-ness and slow suicide, since “man cannot live without hope: life would become meaningless and unbearable” (*Assembly for*

Europe). We are invited to discover and experience Christ, risen and glorified as the wellspring of our hope. Francis manifests also optimism even if he describes the “new difficulties” (n. 277) because in our world beauty is born anew and transforms the storms of history. “Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power” (n. 276).

It deserves to reproduce a nice paragraph about the “sense of mystery”:

“Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks: “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Co 4: 7). This certainty is often called “a sense of mystery”. It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (cf. Jo 15:5). This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for the others” (n. 279).

That is why Francis adds that mission is not like a business, and so escapes all measurement. The Holy Spirit “works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills (ibid.). We can feel ourselves “disoriented”. And the Pope adds: “I myself have frequently experienced this” (n. 280). His reaction is however a kind of “abandon”, “renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting the Spirit enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills” (ibid). An ulterior recommendation is about “the missionary power of intercessory prayer” (n. 281-283). Once again we underline the very personal character of the expressions of the Pope.

Like in other Church documents we have at the end

some paragraphs consecrated to Mary called “Mother of Evangelization”. In the very well-constructed n. 286, the Pope recalls the evangelical moments of Marian interventions, and adds the allusion to the abundant shrines for her, because “Mary shares the history of each people which has received the Gospel and she becomes a part of their history. The example quoted by the Pope is especially touching. It is a sentence of the old document *Nican Mopohua*, the narration of the apparition of Mary to the Indian Juan Diego at the Tepeyac (Guadalupe), written in nahuatl language. So, for our new time, Mary can be called “Star of the new evangelization”. In the Church we follow the “Marian style of evangelization”: justice and tenderness, contemplation and concern, she is the model of evangelization. An inspired prayer to Mary concludes *Evangelii Gaudium*.

As final observations, we can say that Pope Francis seems critic rather about conservative positions and nostalgias. Instead, in a very personal way, alluding to his own experience, he insists in the strength of the Gospel of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. His exhortation is not a programmatic document following the “propositions” of the Synod, but a personal expression of his passion for evangelization including some points like the poor, the popular religiosity and the importance of the means of evangelization, especially the homily.

We have in *Evangelii Gaudium* a very synthesis of the spirit of Francis and a kind of summary of the new times of evangelization of the World, fruit of faith and hope in the Lord and the intercession of Mary.

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HAZLETON Lesley, *After the Prophet. The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split*, Anchor Books, New York, 2010, 239

p.

The author is a British born journalist of the Middle East. She is a master of the Arabic language and the ancient and modern history of this area of the world. Her book offers notes, sources and an Index of names, but it is not a scientific production, with the indication of each quotation. Therefore it is easy to read and becomes a kind of introduction to the Arabic world in the period of its formation.

The epoch of this story is well delimited: “After the Prophet”, that means after 632, until the death of Hussein the youngest son of Ali which is considered of the martyr hero of the Shia branch of Islam. We intend only to offer a simple synthesis of a research of a non-negligible interest in the present world situation.

The “Prologue” makes allusion to the massacre perpetrated on March 4, 2004, the Ashura day, in the city of Karbala (Iraq), in the great commemoration of Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad. The Sunni extremist group of Al Qaida in Iraq had calculated the attack with precision. Since 680, date of the massacre of Hussein, Karbala is the symbol of Shia group, and until now the question is: “How can it come to this? (p. 2). The book tries to answer to this question, through three great parts: Muhammad, Ali, and Hussein.

First, we have to understand the problem of the death of Muhammad. After his famous wife Khadija, he had nine other wives, but no male child. Since the aristocracy of Mecca – the Quraysh – did not accept the message of Muhammad, on 622 he, with a small group of faithful, fled to Medina that becomes the City of the Prophet. After his victory on Meccans and his paradigmatic pilgrimage to the Kaaba – El Haj – he died in Medina on 632, assisted by the youngest of wives, Aisha.

Who will be the successor of the Prophet, the Calif?

According to the Sunni, the community – the Uma – guided by God. That was the idea of Aisha. According to the Shia, the successor should be Ali, the son of Abu Talib and the spouse of Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad. We know the events through the tradition of Aisha and the historian Al-Tabari, who was a Sunni, but whose authority is recognized by all (39 volumes in English).

After a long discussion, Abu Bakr, the father of Aisha, was elected first Calif of Islam. The Prophet was buried in Aisha's house. Abu Bakr designed Omar as second calif at his death. He put discipline and conquest Syria and Iraq. It is the time of decay of Persia and Byzantine Empire. He was assassinated by a Persian Christian slave. The six designated electors summoned Othman, who was in his seventies, and became the third calif. He lasted twelve years as the Deputy of God, and was assassinated. He belonged to the Umayyad family and promoted corruption and nepotism. The empire was extended until Egypt and Persia and Caspian Sea. The blood-stained shirt of Othman was sent to Damascus (Syria). In Medina, Ali was proclaimed Imam and the 4th Calif. He was the husband of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet. A very pious Muslim, he reached the unity of Islam. Aisha fled to Mecca, and accused Ali of the murder of Othman.

Later on, Aisha with Meccans arrived at Basra. The sons of Ali, Hasan and Hussein arrived from Kuffa (North Iraq). Ali uttered these prophetic words:

“To set things right is what I intend, so that the community may return to being brothers. If the Meccans give us allegiance, then we will have peace. But if they insist on fighting, this will be a split that cannot be repaired. So men, restrain yourselves. Remember that these people are your brothers. Be patient. Beware of rushing into anything without guidance, for if you win the argument today, you may lose it tomorrow” (p. 108).

The Battle of Camel took place at Bashra, Iraq on 7 November 656. Ali's troops were victorious, but the split between Sunni – Aisha and Meccans and Syrians – and Shiite – Ali and Iraq and Iran – was in some sense pre-announced.

Muawiya, governor of Syria, did not pledge alliance to Ali as calif, who moved to the city of Kuffa (Iraq). On July 657 the two armies were at Siffin. Muawiya used the strategy to put a parchment of the Quran in the lances. So the battle had no place. Ali went back to Kuffa and Muawiya to Damascus. Meantime, a new group of Muslims appeared led by Abdullah ibn Wahb, the founder of fundamentalist Wahhabi sect “that today holds sway in Saudi Arabia and is the ideological backbone of Sunni extremism” (p. 141). Against Ali and Muawiya they shouted: “Judgment belongs to God alone!” (p. 142).

On Friday, January 26 of 661, Ali was assassinated in the mosque of Kuffa. “In time, a shrine would be built over Ali's grave on that sandy rise, and the city of Najaf would grow up around it” (p. 153).

After this detailed narration “after the Prophet”, the author gives still the story of the two sons of Ali: Hasan and Hussein, and at the same time she explains the story of Muawiya, who became the 5th calif during 19 years, and his son Yazid. With them the dynasty of Umayyad was installed in Damascus, and the Caliphate become hereditary. Both represent the Sunni trend, very political and military, and radically opposed to the Shia. Yazid sent Ziyad as governor of Kuffa. Muawiya was crowned Calif in Jerusalem, following the Byzantine model. In fact, many of his officials were Christians.

In fact, Hazelton clearly shows her preference for this line of Shiites that represents in some sense the pure and honest Islam. Hasan, the oldest son of Ali, had an attempt of assassination in Kufa. He was acclaimed as

the second Imam. Intellectual and pious, he was buried at the cemetery of Medina.

Now we have a long description of the murder of Hussein, the youngest son of Ali, and the true hero of Shia. The fact occurred in Karbala. It became the holy city of Shia. Leaving Mecca for Iraq, he said: "What is fate is fated. And will happen whether I heed or not" (p. 174).

"He was not a warrior or a statesman. He was a revered scholar, honored since his brother's death as the one who more than any man alive embodied the spirit of Muhammad" (p. 178).

He was conscious of his "sacrifice" (*Shahadat*). Ali Shariati, the intellectual head of the Iran revolution of 1979, presented Hussein as the model of a "new Islamic Humanism".

In the book, the description of the death of Hussein, with many similitudes to Jesus' death, is very thorough. It was on October 10, 680, at Karbala. After him, the Shiites wait for the 12 Imam – "Al-Mahadi" - . In the Arab Empire, after Umayyad dynasty, we have Abbasids dynasty, with the capital in Baghdad, until the invasion of Mongols in 1258. Both however were officially Sunni.

Hazelton gives at the end a flash on the successive history of Sunni and Shia, which is very interesting in order to understand the present. So, for the readers not habituated to the history of Islam, the work is useful and can serve as an introduction to the many aspects of the Muslim situation in the world. In some sense, it prepares one for the prospect of Islam-Christian dialogue. [Hazelton's book also offers a broad historical background for Thomas Mooren's article "Prophecy and Holiness: From the Deathbed of Muhammad *Rasul Allah* to the Peaceful Valley of Ibrahim *Khalil Allah*," in this current issue of *MST Review*, pp. 1-39, above.]

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