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“Eucharistic Congresses and the salvific dimension of the Eucharist at the service of humanity and of society”

Conference by

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1. AT THE ORIGINS OF EUCHARISTIC CONGRESSES

The complexity of theme on the agenda does not permit an exhaustive treatment of the history of Eucharistic Congresses, which is however found in various publications.¹ So, I shall recall only essential points directly connected with our reflection. The idea of Eucharistic Congresses arose in France in the second half of the 19th century from the intuition of a woman, Emile Tamisier (1834-1910,² whose intuition matured in the context of the Eucharistic movement animated by St Peter-Julian Eymard (1811-1868), the founder of the Congregation of the Priests of the Blessed Sacrament, and from other outstanding persons.³ This movement put into concrete action the urgent need to introduce the salvific dimension of the Eucharist into the social context, to enliven in a Christian way the temporal realities and build up the Kingdom of God.⁴

Eucharistic worship in France, in fact, in the second half of the 19th century, returned to the centre of focus and became the common denominator of all forms of a more lively spirituality at that moment through two primary considerations: an anti-Jansenist rediscovery of frequent communion and pluriform ways in which adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was spread, both of which were oriented to encouraging the love of Christ for the building up of his “social reign.”

It was in this context that Emile Tamisier focused on her work of promoting and being involved at all levels of the Eucharistic Works. And it was indeed before the Blessed Sacrament (“coram Sanctissimo”) at Paray-le-Monial (1873) that there blossomed in her this strong conviction: that an integral “social salvation” has its

¹ Cf. P. Marini, *Per la vita del mondo. Il movimento eucaristico internazionale*, in *La Nuova Alleanza*, settembre-ottobre 2010, n. 5; E. Vecchi, *La dimensione sociale dell'Eucaristia*, Ed. Centro Eucaristico, Pontenica 2004; F. Pratzner s.s.s., *The International Eucharistic Congresses 1881-1989: Origin and Development*, in AA.VV., *The International Eucharistic Congresses for a New Evangelisation*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991, p. 7ff.; T. Bello, *I Congressi Eucaristici e il loro significato teologico e pastorale*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2005; A. Rimoldi, *Profilo storico dei Congressi Eucaristici Nazionali*, Comitato direttivo del 20° Congresso Eucaristico Nazionale, Milano 1981.

² Miss Tamisier is usually called Emile, but she is also known by other names: Maria Marta Battistina Emile Tamisier. She was born on November 1st 1834 at Tours and died there in obscurity on June 20th 1910 in an “odor of sanctity” (Cf. B. Spini, *Congressi Eucaristici*, Enciclopedia Cattolica, IV, 351).

³ In this spiritual movement the role of the Jesuit Father Ramière, of Card. Pie, Bishop of Poitiers, and of so many outstanding persons, like Mermillod, de Ségur, Dechamps, Dupanloup, Guéranger, Ozanam, Migne, Pitra and of many others, was fused together with the breath of sanctity of St John Mary Vianney, the ‘Apostle of the Eucharist’ St Peter-Julian Eymard, Blessed Antoine Chevrier, Léon Dupont, “the Holy Man of Tours” and it was united to the beneficent influences present in France in the second half of the 19th century by the moral theology of St Alfonsus Mary de’ Liguori (1696-1787), especially after he was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1871 by Pius IX.

⁴ Cf. AA.VV., *L'Eucaristia sacramento di ogni salvezza, Documento Dottrinale per il 23° Congresso Eucaristico Nazionale (Bologna 1997)*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1996.

indispensable source in the Eucharist carried also to the “crossroads” (cf. Mt 22:9) by means of *Congresses*, which were being adopted on a large scale in the 19th century in order to promote science, the arts, literature, social action, and economic activities.⁵

2. EUCHARISTIC CONGRESSES AND THE “SOCIAL REIGN” OF CHRIST

It thus is clear that at their beginnings Eucharistic Congresses were linked to the theme of spreading the “social reign” of Christ in the personal and collective domains, but it is not at all shown – as a certain contemporary historian maintains – that the objective of the “social regality” in its entirety had a theocratic focus by means of a politicizing of devotion.⁶ In fact, in the blossoming of French spirituality of this period the connection between contemplation and action is always pre-eminent in its evangelising and salvific intentionality, even when it was expressed in intransigent and extreme ways.

Father Jean-Léon Dehon (1843-1925),⁷ for example, a fellow countryman and contemporary of the spiritual movement subjected to criticism, was quite aware that the objective of the apostles of the “social regality” and of the Church itself was not the “restoration of Christian power,” but the reparation of the failures brought about in society by anti-Christian post-revolutionary movements inspired by the positivistic Enlightenment, by socialism and the Freemasonry; this reparation he saw would be realised through spreading the spiritual Reign of the Sacred Heart in individual persons, in families, in nations. In fact, on February 17th 1877 Pius IX himself spoke to him “warmly about the tempest stirred up by the definition of papal infallibility, as if this meant that the Pope should be recognized as able to depose kings or revolutionize the civil order.”⁸

So, to separate in the French spiritual movement the objective of individual sanctification from the extension of the “social reign,” by interpreting it as a desire to “reconstruct a Christian State” governed by the hierarchy to fix the fundamental rules of life in society,⁹ signifies looking at the facts from a “prevalently political and

⁵ Cf. L. Gherardi, *I Congressi Eucaristici a Bologna dal 1927 al 1977*, EDB, Bologna 1986, p. 5.

⁶ Cf. D. Menozzi, *Congressi Eucaristici: identità irrisolta, Il Regno Attualità*, 15.10.1997, pp 523-524.

⁷ He was a secretary of the First Vatican Council and a co-disciple of Benedict XV. He founded the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart and committed himself to the promotion of the Church’s social action in accord with the approach of the Enc. Letter *Rerum novarum*. To him is owed the initiative of building the International Church of Christ the King in Rome.

⁸ Cf. G. Manzoni, *Leone Dehon, uomo dal cuore grande*, EDB, Bologna 1989, pp. 74, 243.

⁹ Cf. D. Menozzi, *op. cit.*, p. 524.

ideological viewpoint rather than from a spiritual and pastoral one.”¹⁰ This viewpoint has recourse to a methodology distorted by a preconception and damaged by the error of an historical perspective,¹¹ which unfortunately is at the basis even of the present lack of commitment on the part of so many Catholics in regard to Christian involvement in temporal realities.

3. THE “SOCIAL REIGN” A FRUIT OF A NEW CHRISTOCENTRIC SPIRITUALITY

The French spiritual awakening in the second half of the 19th century is situated in the turn taken at the beginnings of the pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878): from a form of austere piety, influenced by Jansenism or rationalism of the Enlightenment there came about one that was more open to feelings, which was less rigorist, inspired by the new romantic culture. There emerged, thus, the need for a more assiduous frequenting of the sacraments, as well as for more pious exercises and devotions, which also took place in a context of associations and movements.¹²

The figure of Christ and his merciful love returned to the centre. This was in reaction to a Christianity of a deist kind that sprang up from the second half of the 18th century under the influence of the French Encyclopedists. The new spiritual course, despite some awkward devotional practices sometimes in unhappy forms of expression, attained the essence of Christianity: “Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the Incarnation of the infinite love of God towards us, [is] truly present – for love – in the Blessed Sacrament.”¹³

¹⁰ Cf. G. Martina, *Una storia del cristianesimo*, in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3549, pp. 274-275: “Unfortunately in Menozzi research there is no lack of recurrent negative ideas, that are like idées fixes, sometimes expressed acrimoniously.”

¹¹ Cf. A. Marchetto, a review of the two last volumes of the «*Storia del Cristianesimo*» published by Laterza a cura di G. Filoramo and D. Menozzi, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 28, 1998, pp. 9-10. The reviewer refers to the 2nd part of the volume «*Storia del Cristianesimo: L'età contemporanea*», writes: “Let us immediately say that Daniele Menozzi’s treatment is very disappointing [...] Menozzi lacks above all that *understanding* for the object of his study which is the first requisite of an historian [...]” “And here the *leitmotiv* of the whole work begins. He maintains that every meaning of the Christian identity is the same as intransigence, a theocracy and *papal monarchy*, the desire to subordinate the state and society to the pope, as would characterize the *medieval period*.” As regards what touches our argument, the authoritative reviewer continues his criticism of Menozzi, according to whom Catholic organisations in the second half of the 19th century “tended to constructing a kind of Catholic-counter society, separated from the surrounding world and opposed to it [...]” The politicizing of devotion and the social reign of the Sacred Heart would be geared toward “subordinating all states to the directives of the papacy, the only defender of the rules of equity [...] the unique guarantee of a just and lasting peace [...]” According to the impertinent author, the social doctrine of the Church “will stay bound to the revindication of an ecclesiastical power over the civil consortium until the Second Vatican Council.” In essence, according to Menozzi, the Church “is dominated by its ideological position: an intransigence and hierocratic spirit.”

¹² Cf. A. Rimoldi, *Profilo storico dei Congressi Eucaristici Nazionali*, Comitato direttivo del 20° Congresso Eucaristico Nazionale, Milano 1981, p. 5.

¹³ Cf. R. Aubert, *Il pontificato di Pio IX (1846-1878)*, in *Storia della Chiesa dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, a cura di A. Fliche - V. Martin, I ediz. it., a cura di G. Martina, Editrice S.A.I.E., Torino 1964, p. 696.

Above all on the occasion of St Margaret Mary Alacoque's beatification by Pius IX (September 18th 1864), the ultramontane French Catholics gave prominence to the social aspect of the message of the new blessed, the intention being to spread everywhere the sovereignty of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the duty to cooperate for the coming about of his social reign. It is in this spirit, among other things, that the acclamation of royal praise began to be diffused: "*Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.*"¹⁴

The idea of the Eucharistic Congresses, therefore, is situated in the heart of a spiritual movement that places Jesus Christ at the center of attention,¹⁵ in a perspective in which devotional life is expressed within a context of absolute fidelity to the Pope and a strong sense of belonging to the Church.¹⁶

The work of the leading personalities of this extraordinary spiritual flourishing of a really and truly "interior transformation of Catholicism,"¹⁷ irrespective of their liberal or intransigent sympathies, democratic spirit or nostalgic hankering for the *ancien régime*, Gallican or Ultramontane tendencies, in the last analysis converged on a common objective: the diffusion of the Kingdom of Christ on the earth.

4. THE CONGRESS MOVEMENT AND THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT INTERSECT

Today, even in the ecclesial field, there prevails the tendency to remove *in toto*, the experience of movements from the "social reign" of Christ. This attitude, due more to an ideological vision than a theology of the mystery of the Church, risks in failing to apply the necessary distinction between the *substance* of objectives followed by the movement for the building up of the Christian "social reign" and the contingent *elements* connected to the sensitivity and changeable circumstances related to ecclesial life and a socio-political dynamic.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cf. A. Rimoldi, *op. cit.*, p. 6: cites the French musician Verboite, author of a composition of this *laude regia*, which can be traced to the end of the VIIIth century and little by little introduced in various forms (Cf. E. H. E.H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes regiae: a Study in Mediaeval Ruler Worship and Liturgical Acclamations*, Berkeley, 1946).

¹⁵ Cf. R. Aubert, *Il pontificato di Pio IX*, *op. cit.*, p. 696.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Zambarbieri, *La devozione al Papa*, in AA.VV., *La Chiesa e la società industriale (1878-1922)*, II, a cura di E. Guerriero e A. Zambarbieri, in *Storia della Chiesa dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Aubert, *Il pontificato di Pio IX*, *op. cit.*, p. 694.

¹⁸ The expression Kingdom of God in the N.T. indicates the central nucleus of Jesus' preaching: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; be converted and believe the gospel" (Mk 1:15). Essentially, to discover the Kingdom of God signifies encountering Jesus, adhering to his person and his teaching. It is not the equivalent of any pre-established scheme, but open to different experiences and possible interpretations, which to be coherent cannot be made to indicate that the Kingdom is the Church, but neither excluding it diluting the Lordship of Christ into a rather full-blown form of "anonymous" Christianity.

The Church is a sacrament of the Kingdom,¹⁹ a visible and perceptible reality, and its evangelical proclamation “must bear fruit and grow” (Col 1:6,10) in every individual and in the whole world, as an *interior* and *exterior* dimension, so that “every person be established perfectly in Christ” (Col 1:28; cf. Eph 4:13).²⁰ In this perspective the historical forms assumed to realize the “social reign” of Christ²¹ do not pertain to the essence of the Kingdom and therefore, being changeable, cannot be deemed *from the ideological standpoint of hindsight*, but evaluated with the help of biblical and patristic data,²² in the light of a sound Catholic theology, which is able to discern with the intelligence of faith the mystery of Christ and the Church in its integrity,²³ to the end of exercising an authentic discernment of the meaning of the Gospel.

In the Eucharistic and Christocentric movement of the French Church there was an intersection of some spiritual currents that, practically speaking above all in restricted environments (monasteries, sanctuaries, etc.), little by little assumed broader and more popular dimensions within a spiritual dynamism that always found its unifying focus in the Eucharist, the sacrament par excellence of personal and social salvation: the cult of the Sacred Heart, the Apostolate of Prayer and Marian devotion.

Here there comes together, not only the thrust toward devotion to Christ’s humanity that goes back to St Anselm (1033-1109), St Bernard (1090-1153) and St Bonaventure (1221-1272), but also the wellspring of the spirituality of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), Father Charles de Condren (1588-1641), Venerable Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657) and St Jean Eudes (1601-1680), who were all so dear to Cardinal Lercaro, who gathered together this spiritual heritage in his text “*Method of mental prayer.*”²⁴

¹⁹ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 3: “the Church, or the Kingdom of Christ already present in mystery, by God’s power is growing visibly in the world”; n. 5: “This Kingdom is clearly manifest to people in the word, works and the presence of Christ... The Church of this Kingdom constitutes on earth the seed and beginning”.

²⁰ Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Signoria e Regno di Dio*, EDB, Bologna 1990, pp. 319-321.

²¹ Cf. P. Galtier, *Regalità di Gesù Cristo*, in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, X, pp. 632-635.

²² Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Signoria e Regno di Dio*, EDB, Bologna 1990.

²³ Cf. G. Biffi, *La Chiesa e il Regno*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1993.

²⁴ G. Lercaro, *Metodo di orazione mentale*, Editrice Massimo, Milano 1969 (1st ed. 1947). The Cardinal wrote this text particularly to show the interconnection between devotion, popular piety and the liturgical movement, which he placed at the centre of his pastoral activity (Cf. E. Vecchi, *Introduzione*, in *L’eredità pastorale di Giacomo Lercaro, Studi e testimonianze*, EDB, Bologna 1992, pp. 15-33). Cf., also, G. Lercaro, *Il Sacro Cuore di Gesù e il rinnovamento liturgico*, in AA.VV., *Il Cuore di Gesù e il rinnovamento conciliare*, a cura di A. Tessarolo, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna-Napoli-Padova 1966, p. 17.

For certain, the *humus* in which the seeds of the Eucharistic Congresses developed – in the perspective of the integral promotion of the Christian message in society – is the same as gave life to the liturgical movement. In fact, the love of Christ, for the Virgin, for the Church, for Tradition and the Pope, which were lived in popular and devotional piety, intersect with the emergent awareness of the liturgical mystery, above all through the “intransigent” work of Dom Guéranger (1805-1877), the Abbot of Solesmes, who restored the Benedictine Order in France and is called a father of the liturgical movement.²⁵

5. THE “GROUNDS” FOR EUCHARISTIC CONGRESSES AND THE CHURCH’S MISSION

The pontificate of John Paul II had during the millenium year 2000 a most significant moment. Within the wide sweep of events during the Great Jubilee, which the pope called “an intensely Eucharistic year,”²⁶ there re-emerged also “grounds” for an extraordinary gathering of the Churches around the Eucharist. These “grounds” need today to be rediscovered insofar as the year of the International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin (2012) coincides with the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962). Moreover, Pope Benedict XVI has convoked in this same year, 2012, the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: “*The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith*,”²⁷ The announcement of this followed upon his setting up of a new office in the Roman Curia: “*The Pontifical Council for the promotion of the new evangelisation*” (September 21, 2010).²⁸

The providential coincidence of these events throws light on Eucharistic texture of the Conciliar Magisterium, in particular as a rich affirmation of its theological-pastoral potential: “The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church,(16) that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread... In this light, *the Eucharist shows itself as the*

²⁵ Cf. O. Rousseau, *Storia del movimento liturgico*, Ed. Paoline, Roma 1961; A. Genestout, *Guéranger*, in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, VI, 1226-1227; R. Aubert, *Il pontificato di Pio IX (1846-1878)*, in *Storia della Chiesa dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, a cura di A. Fliche-V. Martin, I ediz. It., a cura di G. Martina, Editrice S.A.I.E., Torino 1964, p. 696.

²⁶ Cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 55, EV /14/1811.

²⁷ Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25-26 ottobre 2010, p. 8.

²⁸ Cf. Apostolic Letter in a form of «Motu Proprio» *Ubicumque et semper*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 13, 2010, pp. 4-5. The main scope of this new structure is that of “promoting a renewed evangelisation especially in countries where the first proclamation of faith has already been made and where there are Churches already established, but which are becoming progressively secularised.” All this corresponds to what Paul VI was aware of and expressed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, as: “the overwhelming conciliar yearning for the evangelisation of the contemporary world.” Moreover Pope Benedict intended to gather the heritage of John Paul II, who became the icon of the *new evangelisation* through his action and his magisterium.

source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel.”²⁹ In this perspective, John Paul II told the European bishops (1982) that the eucharist is the “*locus theologicus*” in which to look when interpreting in the light of the Spirit the “*today*” of the history of salvation in Europe, particularly in view of the renewed evangelization.³⁰

In the aftermath of the Council there has been a notable dimming of the originating idea linked with Eucharistic Congresses, the idea connected to the Eucharist as “a sacrament of all salvation” and, hence, a radical remedy of the present ills of society and a *nourishment* for the entire vitality of the world (Cf. Jn 6:51). Such an obscuring has sometimes affected the fervor of those participating in the Congresses themselves, compromising a wholehearted reception of the “*particular grace of the Lord*” connected to these events.³¹ In view of the Third Millennium Cardinal Paul Poupard emphasised that Eucharistic Congresses play a decisive role in confronting the “challenges” of the new evangelization,³² especially after the new orientations given by the Church for the celebration of these ecclesial events.³³

So, it is necessary to recover the pastoral sense that animated Leo XIII (1810-1903) at the moment of approving the Work of International Eucharistic Congresses and the celebration of the 1st International Eucharistic Congress of Lille in 1881. He recognized in this endeavor the possibility of rediscovering the Christian event in its divine-human integrity and the occasion for spurring on the grouping together of Catholics, as was taking place throughout Europe among lay associations of people. It was an attempt to galvanize, also on a social level, communion between Catholics (often divided on a political plain), so that they would have a more incisive presence in the old continent.³⁴ Thus, ten years later, in 1891, a similar intention animated the same Pontiff when he stimulated and approved the celebration of the 1st Italian National Eucharistic Congress at Naples.³⁵ In this same year he published the Encyclical Letter “*Rerum Novarum*” (1891), which confirmed and gave a decisive impulse to Catholics in society.³⁶

²⁹ Cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5, EV /1/1253. Regarding the term “evangelisation” a clarification is needed today in the light of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of Paul VI, who presents evangelisation as a “*complex process*” (cf. n. 24), that tends to healing the “split between Gospel and culture, the drama of our epoch” (cf. n.20).

³⁰ Cf. *Discorso alla riunione di consultazione dell’Assemblea speciale per l’Europa del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Oct. 5, 1982, V/3, pp. 689-695.

³¹ Cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 55, EV /14/1811.

³² Cf. P. Poupard, *The Eucharist and the New Evangelisation: A challenge for Eucharistic Congresses*, in *The International Eucharistic Congresses for a New Evangelisation*, op.cit, p. 67f.

³³ Cf. Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, *Premesse al Rito della comunione fuori della Messa e culto eucaristico*, nn. 105-108.

³⁴ Cf. K. Bihlmeyer – H. Tuechle, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. IV, Morcelliana, Brescia 1959, pp. 232-233.

³⁵ The next Italian National Eucharistic Congress (the XXVth) will be held in the diocese of Ancona-Osimo, from Sept. 3-11, 2011, on the theme: “Lord, to whom shall we go?”

³⁶ Cf. G. Venturi, *Storia del Credito Romagnolo*, Editori Laterza, Bari 1996, pp. 10-11.

Today, at the beginning of the second decade of the XXIst century, facing the need for Catholics to find again an active role in the social dynamic, the Church is called to re-evaluate and redefine among other matters the effective potential of Eucharistic Congresses to combat the challenges of Postmodernity. This can come about by recovering fully a *persuasive motive* immersed in the last decade, like the “*leitmotif*” in the Eucharistic teaching of Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, that is, the *persuasive motive* that always accompanies the Church’s path between the alternative circumstances of history, independently from the steps taken in its theological awareness: that is, the conviction of having received together with the gift of the Eucharist the genetic code of its identity and the inexhaustible wellspring of its potentiality, namely, a complete and exclusive gift that places it before the world as a sacrament of integral “social salvation.”

Consequently, the Eucharist in its real identity with Jesus Christ is the primary reference point in judging, shaping, revitalizing, orienting every pastoral choice and action.³⁷ In fact, one of the principal purposes of Eucharistic Congresses is so that the Churches periodically involved may receive a fresh impulse to enliven their pastoral action, thus reaping the fruit of the special “congress grace.”³⁸

6. THE EUCHARIST: AN APPROACH TO THE PRINCIPAL MYSTERIES OF FAITH

The International Eucharistic Congress of Rome in the year 2000 was the climactic point of the jubilee celebrations that focused attention on Jesus Christ, the “*most honored Guest*”³⁹ on his 2000th birthday, present in the Church in virtue of the Eucharist. This Congress pointed out to the entire world the Eucharist itself as a sacramental terminus and also way of access to the two principal mysteries of faith, a wonderful synthesis of the divine design of salvation, and thus, a centre and highpoint of the Jubilee event.⁴⁰

Indeed, the objective of the “celebrative phase” of the Jubilee has been the glorification of the Trinity, the first of the principal mysteries of the Christian faith, from which “everything springs and towards which everything is directed in the world

³⁷ Cf. I. Biffi – G. Colombo, *L'Eucaristia al centro della comunità e della sua missione*, 20th National Eucharistic Congress, 1981, p. 8.

³⁸ Cf. E. Vecchi, *La vita liturgica alla confluenza della vita pastorale parrocchiale*, in *Rivista Liturgica*, March-April 1991, n. 2, pp. 237-268.

³⁹ Cf. G. Biffi, *I frutti di un Congresso Eucaristico*, in *Liber pastoralis*, EDB, Bologna 2002, n. 11, p.430.

⁴⁰ Cf. G. Biffi – E. Vecchi, *Il Congresso Eucaristico Internazionale*, in *Presenza Pastorale*, January-February 1995, nn. 1-2, pp. 117-126.

and in history.” God reveals himself in Christ as a Trinity, has opened to humankind the access to his own intimate life,⁴¹ showing it to all as an ineffable life of relatedness, as a transcendent reality of interior giving, as a symphony of communion and love. With the Trinitarian revelation, God has told us that he is not only an infinite impassive from being; he is also and above all life, that is the interior fruitfulness and community of joy.⁴²

Furthermore, the Jubilee celebration, in virtue of its Eucharistic connotation, have emphasized the presence of Christ in the “today” of the Church, putting into relief the other principal mystery of Christian faith, that is, the redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God. In fact, the Eucharist is like the crowning feature of the Incarnation: if the Incarnation bestowed on humankind the unspeakable and resplendent mystery of Christ, the Eucharist develops this mystery progressively, giving a “*sacramental foundation to the Christian existence*,”⁴³ which is expressed in the *Christus totus*, that is, in the Church that actualises in time and space the design of the Father.⁴⁴

In the Church, therefore, thanks to the Eucharist, Christ is *a reality*, not an hypothesis, a myth, a religious symbol. He is *a living reality*, humanly alive, who breathes, pulsating, rejoicing, contemplating, loving; he is not an “historic” person, mummified in books. He is *a working reality*; he is not cut off from our existence and from our world, but he is principle of life and support of all.⁴⁵ So, there is “the *urgent need*” to deepen the truth about Christ as a unique Mediator between God and humankind “distinguishing him clearly from the founders of other religions.”⁴⁶ It was to state this fundamental truth that in 2000 the declaration “*Dominus Iesus*” was published.⁴⁷

As a consequence, the pastoral teaching of the Church modeled on Christ, is assisted by the Eucharistic Congresses to recover some of its characteristic that cannot be surrendered: 1) “*catholicity*,” which expresses two inseparable dimensions of the Christian message: “*totality*” (“according to all”) and “*identity*” (a “*deposit*” to be conserved intact: cf. 1 Tm 6:20); not all expositions regarding Christianity today contain

⁴¹ Cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nn. 8.55, EV /14/1811.

⁴² Cf. G. Biffi, *Matrimonio e famiglia*, in *Liber pastoralis*, EDB, Bologna 2002, n. 16, p. 256.

⁴³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, subtitle of Vol. XI, *Teologia della Liturgia*, Opera Omnia, ed. italiana, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2010.

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Biffi, *Eucaristia e opere di misericordia*, meditation at the 22nd Nazionale Eucaristic Congress, Siena 1994, Bollettino dell'Arcidiocesi di Bologna, June 1994, p. 209.

⁴⁵ Cf. G. Biffi, *Introduzione alla «Diurna laus»*, in AA.VV., *Predicare oggi*, Editrice Ancora, Milano 1982, p. 203.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 38, EV /14/1786.

⁴⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dichiarazione Dominus Iesus, Circa l'unicità e l'universalità salvifica di Gesù Cristo e della Chiesa*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2000, EV /19/1142-1200.

in themselves the essence of *catholicity*;⁴⁸ 2) “*globality*” that involves the evangeliser in transfiguring into Christ all people and everything: “*every creature*” (cf. Mt 16:15),⁴⁹ that is, creation and humankind in all their existential dimensions; 3) “*originality*,” an evident sign of the “change of life and mentality:” whoever has faith cannot have the same lifestyle and the same concept of the world as an unbeliever; 4) “*undeniability*”: the Christian event is a “fact” before being a religion, hence, it cannot be confused with other cults and doctrines, if not as a complement of their “yearning” for arriving at the truth, as is put forward in the teaching of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.⁵⁰

In such a perspective, the pastoral paths of the local Churches, thanks to the extraordinary events like Eucharistic Congresses, can expand their potentialities. By means of these, in fact, when they are celebration in fidelity to *Christological* and *Trinitarian* contents, the Christian communities are led in virtue of the dynamic of the congresses to rediscover “*zips*” capable of strengthening and corroborating in ecclesial activity the constitutive relationship between the Eucharist, the Church and the world: the Eucharist as an epiphany and first fruits of the Church; the Church as the first fruits and epiphany of the new world.⁵¹ In other words, these extraordinary events help us to see and live the Eucharist as a Church “*in bud*” and the Church as Eucharist “*blossoming*” in daily relations, as a principle and driving force of a new and different lifestyle.

7. INCULTURATING THE EUCHARIST TO INCULTURATE THE FAITH

Today the Church considers a Eucharistic Congress as a “*statio*,” that is as an extraordinary point of gathering for commitment and prayer “to deepen together some aspect of the Eucharistic mystery and to offer it the homage of public veneration in the

⁴⁸ Cf. L. Scheffczick, *Il mondo della fede cattolica. Verità e forma*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2007. In this book – introduced by an interview with Benedict XVI – the author (created a cardinal by John Paul II) without taking for granted all its amplitude and its objective difficulty faces the question of the structure, truth and *viability* of Christianity in relation to the essence of Catholicism. This book provides a help to rethink in a synthetic perspective almost all the major theological issues. (Cf. C. Ruini, *Rieducarsi al Cristianesimo. Il tempo che stiamo vivendo*, Mondadori, Milano 2008).

⁴⁹ Cf. G. Biffi, *Per la vita del mondo, Itinerario pastorale in preparazione al Congresso Eucaristico Diocesano del 1987*, in *Liber pastoralis*, EDB, Bologna 2002, pp. 25-26: “From Revelation received in faith, from the liturgy of the New Covenant, from the ardour of charity, characteristically of Jesus’ disciples, every person must become transfigured in all dimensions of living (personal, in family, social), at whatever age (childhood, youth, maturity, old age), in every existential situation (love, sorrow, joy, amusement, illness, work, culture, politics).”

⁵⁰ Cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 6, EV /14/1724; *Caritas in veritate*, n. 78.

⁵¹ Cf. G. Biffi, *Eucaristia, Chiesa e mondo*, Bollettino dell’Arcidiocesi di Bologna, Sept. 1986, pp. 524-556, nn. 5-6.

bond of charity and unity.”⁵² In such a context Eucharistic Congresses can be considered in a double perspective: as *events* of grace and as pastoral *occasions*.⁵³

- 1) The Congress as an *event* of grace offers the Church celebrating it from time to time the possibility of recentering the life of persons and communities on the inexhaustible potentiality of the Eucharist as a “*font*” of every spiritual resource and as a “*summit*” of every ecclesial activity.⁵⁴
- 2) The Congress as a pastoral occasion expresses the need for the Eucharist to be from time to time “*raised up as an “ensign to the peoples who are searching anxiously”*” (cf. Is 11:10) as an appropriate response to the thirst for truth that every person has in his or her heart.⁵⁵ It is the perspective pointed out by Benedict XVI when he spoke of the opportunity for the Church to open a kind of “*outer court of the gentiles.*”⁵⁶ In this optic, “social salvation” takes on the characteristics of the *inculturazione of faith* by means of the *inculturation of the Eucharist*, which in the dynamic of the congress finds one of the extraordinary most effective instruments to point out to a confused society the salvific potentiality of the mystery of the Incarnation.⁵⁷

The Church that today is active in a rapidly changing world finds itself facing new sensibilities and new languages, which demand new pastoral methods, but the substance of its message does not change. So, without the inculturation of the Eucharist in its real identity with Jesus Christ it cannot be an authentic inculturation of the faith,⁵⁸ because the Eucharist – as we have seen – is the *source* and *summit* of all evangelization,⁵⁹ of which inculturation presents the hard test insofar as it must foster the contents of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “that essential and complete formulation of the faith for people of our time.”⁶⁰

⁵² Cf. CEI: *Premesse al Rito della comunione fuori della Messa e culto eucaristico*, n. 105.

⁵³ Cf. E. Vecchi, *Il Congresso Eucaristico evento e occasione*, Quaderni del Congresso Eucaristico Diocesano, n. 3, EDB, Bologna 1987.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10, EV /1/16.

⁵⁵ The Eucharist in the logic of congresses is publicly shown as the historical concrete expression of the “banquet that the Lord in the retreat prepares on the mountain for all people,” to tear down the “veil” of ambiguity covering humanity’s face; to wipe away every tear; to do away with death for ever (cf. Is 25:6-9).

⁵⁶ Cf. *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2009, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 21-22 dicembre 2009.

⁵⁷ Cf. P. Poupard, *The Eucharist and the New Evangelisation: A challenge for Eucharistic Congresses*, op. cit., pp. 79ff.

⁵⁸ Cf. E. Vecchi, *Comunità cristiana e inculturazione della fede*, in AA.VV., *Approfondimento concettuale della fede e inculturazione*, Edizioni Studio Domenicano (ESD), Bologna 1996, pp. 241-257.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5, EV /1/1253.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Lo Statuto del Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione della nuova evangelizzazione*, in *Apostolic Letter in the form of a «Motu proprio» “Ubicumque et semper”*, art. 3/5°, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 13, 2010, pp. 4-5.

Insofar as they are *events* of grace and pastoral *occasions*, therefore, Eucharistic Congresses have the task of leading back to their centre the person of Christ and his Gospel, so that the work of inculturation of the Eucharist may enter truly into the concrete situation of human life.⁶¹ As regards Eucharistic inculturation – as Benedict XVI wrote – it is necessary to make explicit the relation between the Eucharistic Mystery and social commitment in order to strengthen communion and peace. The Church must be inserted into society not on the political level, but by means of *rational discourse* and by awakening spiritual forces, without which justice cannot be proclaimed.⁶² In this regard, the beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman (on September 19, 2010) opens interesting horizons for recovering the faith-reason relationship in a context of fully-fledged humanization (*Cor ad cor loquitur*).⁶³

8. THE TRANSFORMING DYNAMISM OF THE PASCHAL SACRAMENT

In the celebration of a Eucharistic Congress a constant of ecclesial praxis must never be lost to sight: “every great reform is linked in some way to a rediscovery of faith in the Eucharistic presence of the Lord in the midst of his people,” because the Eucharist giving shape to the life and action of the Church diffuses *truth* and *charity* in society.⁶⁴ Paul Claudel said that “the quintessence of Christianity is the Eucharist,” and Teilhard de Chardin expressed the conviction that even in our time these words can be pronounced: “the Eucharist invades the universe. It is the fire that sweeps over the heath. It is stroke that vibrates through the bronze [...]. The sacramental Species are formed by the totality of the world, and the duration of the creation is the time needed for its consecration.”⁶⁵

Benedict XVI even writes that the “substantial conversion” of the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ places into creation the “principle of a radical change,” a kind of “*nuclear fission*” introduced into the most intimate heart of being,

⁶¹ Cf. CEL, *Atti del 4° Convegno Ecclesiale Nazionale, “Testimoni di Gesù risorto, speranza del mondo”*, Verona, 16- Oct. 20, 2006, EDB, Bologna 2008: the Meeting identified five situations of pastoral concern: 1) affective life; 2) work and celebration; 3) weakness; 4) tradition; 5) citizenship.

⁶² Cf. *Sacramentum caritatis*, n. 89, EV /24/215.

⁶³ The beatification of Cardinal Newman not only glorified his personal holiness, but also his “universal significance” that fits well into the dynamic of Eucharistic Congresses. On the other hand, Newman concrete appreciation of Christ’s presence as expressing the Father’s merciful love attracted many to the faith. (‘*Cor ad cor loquitur*’ was his motto as a cardinal.) On the other hand, he sought to link reason to faith through his Sermons, which always had a pastoral outreach. Newman, in fact, was always a pastor: first as an Anglican, then as a Catholic priest. (Cf. I. Ker, *La ragionevole fede di Newman*, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 16, 2010, p. 1.)

⁶⁴ *Sacramentum caritatis*, nn. 6-7, EV /24/110-111.

⁶⁵ Cf. L. Scheffczyk, *Il mondo della fede cattolica. Verità e Forma*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2007, p. 239 – cf. *Le Milieu Divin* (Collins, Fontana Books, 1966), p.125f.

which brings about a “process of the transfiguration of reality,” the ultimate term of which will be the transfiguration of the entire world.⁶⁶ In sum, the Eucharist nourishes an evangelizing thrust that “brings us into dialogue with various cultures and in a certain sense challenges them.”⁶⁷ In fact, this great “Mystery of faith” becomes the criterion of evaluating everything that a Christian encounters in the various cultural expressions.⁶⁸

Moreover, with the Eucharist – an objective memorial of the Cross and sacrament of all salvation – we offer to humankind the only possible interpretive key of its inevitable suffering, providing thus – in the midst of so much suffering – a glimmer of sufficient serenity to find again the taste for living and cultivating hope. With the celebration of Mass and Eucharistic worship as a whole we bring back among human beings God who to many seems hidden, but who instead has chosen to remain among us throughout all the hours of existence, even the most tragic,⁶⁹ that God who in Jesus Christ descended to the utter depth of humanity,” to introduce light into “the night of Redemption.”⁷⁰

9. SUNDAY: A “PRIMORDIAL” JOYFUL FEAST

Joy pertains to the fundamental components of every Eucharistic gathering, because the presence of Christ is a motive of “great joy for all people (cf. Lk 2:10), and consequently, the Church rejoices for salvation,”⁷¹ because it celebrates and keep safe the Sacrament that generates it. In fact, it is indeed the Eucharist, the font of Christian joy, insofar as it is a sacrament of the Pasch of the crucified and risen Christ, who “truly realizes our liberation from evil and death.”⁷²

⁶⁶ Cf. *Sacramentum caritatis*, n. 11, EV /24/115.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Sacramentum caritatis*, n. 78, EV /24/202.

⁶⁸ Consequently, “insofar as it will appear intrinsic to the Eucharistic mystery, it would be substantially rediscovered in the ecclesial mystery and would be assumed a san inspirational principle of every form of acting and vitality in the Church. Thus, all that pertains to and characterizes the ecclesial mystery will uncover what in the world must be faced and combated, what must be evaluated, what must be included so that human beings comply with the Father’s will and find salvation. In a word, the Eucharist, being the essential feature of the Church, will contextually show us what is necessary *for the life of the world.*” (G. Biffi, *Eucaristia, Chiesa e mondo*, in *Bollettino dell’Arcidiocesi di Bologna*, settembre 1986, pp. 524-556, nn.5-6.)

⁶⁹ Cf. AA.VV. *L’Eucaristia sacramento di ogni salvezza*, Doctrinal Document for the 23rd National Eucharistic Congress (Bologna 1997), Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1996, p. 33.

⁷⁰ Cf. G. Rouault, *La notte della redenzione*, catalogue of works of art and designs exposed in the Gallery of Modern Art “Raccolta Lercaro”, Edizioni ETS, Bologna 2010.

⁷¹ Cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 16, EV /14/1739.

⁷² *Sacramentum caritatis*, n. 9, EV /24/113.

In the perspective of joy, then, every Eucharistic Congress leads us back to the roots of the Christian feast (*festum*), which arises from the coming together of two essential factors: an important event to be recalled (Christ's Pasch) and the need to gather together to celebrate it.⁷³ The Christian feast thus must remain anchored in the principal mysteries of our faith (in particular the paschal event) and at the appropriate moment, namely on the Sunday of its "primordially"⁷⁴ and its "ordinary solemnity."⁷⁵ But "the Lord's day" – to keep its original freshness – has to be from time to time recalled in a more ample ways and kept as an "*extraordinary solemnity*;" among these ways International, National and Diocesan Eucharistic Congresses have a special significance.

So, the celebration of an International congress event (*Statio Orbis*) is meant to signify to the world the font of true joy and the antidote to the widespread desperation in the secularized society. This joy in the Church becomes nourished by the Sunday Mass. Sunday, in fact, being a "weekly Easter" (as St Augustine says) is "a day of joy and rest," but it is this in a special way because it educates people to true joy, the authentic lines and profound roots of which are thereby rediscovered.⁷⁶

For this indeed there is needed in a way "to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass."⁷⁷ It is here that the risen Christ is at the centre of everything as a fundamental motive for keeping a feast⁷⁸ and hence of recovering the characteristic feature of festivity itself:⁷⁹ repose, intensity of life, contemplation, joy and the works of the eighth day,⁸⁰ which concretely express the meaning of *otium* (to interior harmony) to overcome the *neg-otium* (the burden of servile works), which is identifiable in the "wastage" of the secularized world.⁸¹

⁷³ Cf. E. Vecchi, *Celebrare la domenica in pienezza e verità*, in AA.VV. , *La domenica oggi. Problemi e proposte pastorali*, Edizioni OR, Milano 1991, pp. 71-116.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 106, EV /1/191.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Dies Domini*, n. 87, EV /17/1011.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Dies Domini*, nn. 55-58, EV /17/972-975.

⁷⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 42, EV /1/74.

⁷⁸ Cf. E. Vecchi, *Articolazione ministeriale della comunità*, in AA.VV., *Scommessa sulla parrocchia. Condizioni e percorsi dell'azione pastorale*, Ed. Ancora, Milano 1989, pp. 57-112.

⁷⁹ Cf. J. Pieper, "*Otium*" e culto, Morcelliana, Brescia 1956, p. 39.

⁸⁰ Cf. CEL, *Il giorno del Signore*, nn. 36-37, EC /3/1969-1970.

⁸¹ Cf. G. Colzani, *Celebrare la domenica. Comunità cristiana e crisi della festa*, in *La Rivista del Clero Italiano*, maggio 2002.

In this perspective “the celebration of the day of the resurrection acquire a doctrinal and symbolic value capable of expressing the whole newness of the Christian mystery.”⁸² For this reason Eucharistic Congresses must always highlight their relation to Sunday, truly to show the link between their “*extraordinary solemnity*” (which passes) and the “*ordinary solemnity*” of Sunday, which remains in the rhythm of the Church’s temporal pilgrimage as “a centre of the mystery of time,” “an axis around which history turns” and “a synthesis of the Christian life.”⁸³ Thing being as they are, Sunday is truly “a resource for all”⁸⁴ and we cannot let its significance pass into oblivion.

10. BENEDICT XVI AND THE “CHALLENGE” OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

From all that has been said there clearly emerges the need to rediscover the *pastoral value of Eucharistic Congresses* precisely to highlight the profound link that exists between the Eucharist, the Church and the world. This is so that the “*principality*” of the Eucharist becomes reassessed regarding its important value in the missionary and transforming activity of the Church within the social dynamic. This has assumed a particular importance from the moment that Benedict XVI inserted the theological-pastoral deepening of the *new evangelization* among the specific tasks of the new Pontifical Council, which is called to promote it,⁸⁵ especially in regard to the “First World,” namely, Europe.⁸⁶

For this, the pastoral activity of the Church needs to recover its link with the Eucharist. In fact, if “pastoral action” is the fruit of a theological-scientific reflection on the Church in its daily task of being built up as *a universal sacrament of salvation* within history;⁸⁷ if the Church is the *communion* of humankind with Jesus Christ, welcomed as a life-choice by means of sacramental goals thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit; if, finally, the Church has its principle and its form in the Eucharist, the Eucharist must be recognised as the *principle and inspiring form of pastoral action*.⁸⁸

⁸² *Dies Domini*, n. 22, EV /17/932.

⁸³ Cf. *Dies Domini*, nn. 2, 81, EV /17/902-1005.

⁸⁴ Cf. E. Vecchi, *La domenica una risorsa per tutti. Giorno del Signore, giorno della Chiesa, giorno dell'uomo*, EDB, Bologna 2005.

⁸⁵ Cf. Lettera Apostolica in forma di «Motu Proprio» *Ubicumque et semper*, Art. 3/1°, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 13, 2010, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁶ Cf. E. Vecchi, *La nuova evangelizzazione in Europa*, in AA.VV., *Teologia ed evangelizzazione*, EDB, Bologna 1993, pp. 499-520.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 57, EV /13/1433.

⁸⁸ Cf. I. Biffi e G. Colombo, *20° Congresso Eucaristico Nazionale, Documento teologico*, Milano 1983, p. 7.

Now, the *new evangelization* is called to “remake the Christian fabric of human society. But the condition for this is that the Christian fabric becomes woven again from the ecclesial communities themselves,” as John Paul II wrote in *Christifideles laici* (n. 34).⁸⁹ “On the other hand” – the Second Vatican Council states – “it is not possible that Christian communities are formed without having as their root and hinge the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, from which it must receive whatever educative impulses forming the spirit of community.”⁹⁰ This presupposes the existence of a widespread ministeriality capable of “fulfilling the service of the building up the Body of Christ (cf. Ef 4, 12).”⁹¹ In particular, Eucharistic Congresses are called to highlight the attractiveness of the priestly vocation and the identity of the presbyterate in relation to Christ the Head, Shepherd and Bridegroom.⁹²

In our days, unfortunately, even well-formed communities find themselves facing a rapidly transforming world, in which there are emerging above all at a growing rate the conditioning factors of *relativism* and *secularism*, which have pushed human beings into the “interior desert” of *individualism* deprived of a sense of public and social responsibility.⁹³ All this is taking place in the context of the *digital revolution*, which many people consider as the *infacing* of the great actual crisis at all levels, and as the postmodern “sign” of the total independence of humankind from God.⁹⁴ The passage from the system of “*analogy*” to a “*digitale*” one,⁹⁵ then, places uppermost the dialectic relation between the *real* and *virtual*, which if not dealt with at an educative and

⁸⁹ Cf. Motu proprio *Ubicumque et semper*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 13, 2010, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁰ *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 6, EV /1/1261.

⁹¹ Cf. L. Chiarinelli – E. Vecchi, *Tutti chiamati a servire*, EDB, Bologna 1991. The authors highlight the link between the Eucharist and ministry in the perspective of the Second Vatican Council: “All the Sacraments, like all the ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are closely united to the Holy Eucharist and are oriented to it.” (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5, EV /1/1253.) Cf. also E. Vecchi, *Spiritualità e pastorale liturgica nella formazione permanente del prete*, in *Rivista di pastorale liturgica*, Sept.-Oct. 1991, n. 5, pp. 61-69.

⁹² Eucharistic Congresses cannot neglect the problem of the lack of priestly vocations and the need to rekindle the notion of the identity of the priest in its fundamental relation with Christ the Head, Pastor and Bridegroom, who as such stands not only “*in the Church*,” but also “*before the Church*.” (Cf. *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 16). Only thus is it possible to safeguard the primacy of the “*bonum animarum*” in relation to the personal “*bonum*” regarding the pastoral task of priests. On the preparation for the priesthood – cf. *Letter of the Holy Father to Seminarians* (Oct. 18 2010), *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 18-19 2010, p. 12.

⁹³ Cf. R. Fisichella, *Non formula astratta ma pensiero forte*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 13, 2010, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Today, we find ourselves before a “*new atheism*,” which had taken the place of that “*institutional*” form, after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc (Cf. *Editoriale*, in *Concilium*, 4/2010, pp. 13-16.) No longer is there an atheism that tries to show that God does not exist, but that of “a person who decides to live without or against God.” In the wake of Bertrand Russell, there are those who propose atheism “as a repertoire of intellectual and practical instruments, which pertain to our way of examining the universe and choosing our destiny.” A lucid exponent of this *neoatheism* is Giulio Giorello, who criticizes the concept of the *technique* expressed in *Caritas in veritate* (n. 70), defending his total “*autonomy*” by *being* and he argues with Benedict XVI: “We are weary of various Pastors of the ‘Being.’ *Autonomy* – he writes – is the condition that we acquire for ourselves in daily fatigue. (Cf. G. Giorello, *Senza Dio. Del buon uso dell'ateismo*, Longanesi, Milano 2010, pp. 194-195.) Now, if by *autonomy* one means that “the created things and society itself have laws and their own values”, that must be respected, certainly it is a legitimate need, but if – as Giorello says – it means a total *autonomy* from God, for whom man excludes the Creator of creation, an unacceptable stance is reached. In fact, “without the Creator the creature disappears” (Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 36, EV /1/1431-1432.)

⁹⁵ Cf. E. Vecchi, *Antenna Crucis*, Il passaggio dall'analogico al digitale. Riflessione teologico-pastorale, EDB, Bologna 2010, p 19.

formative level, risks standardising the interchangeability between *true* and *false*, between the *objective* and *subjective*, thus calling into question the very “*principle of non contradiction.*”

According to Benedict XVI the Mass Media, in fact, tends to estrange us from reality, making us all spectators within a “collective dynamic” that shows things superficially: “persons become bodies, and these bodies lose their soul.”⁹⁶ Despite all, the Pope has encouraged believers to “*launch out into the deep*” (cf. Lc 5, 4-6) into the *digital sea* on board the Church’s bark in order to intercept the global crossroads of “*cyberspace.*”⁹⁷ Baptised navigators are called to proclaim the right of God’s rightful place in every epoch, so that by means of the new forms of communication the Lord can arrive at the threshold of every house and every heart.

In such a perspective evangelisation (of which the Eucharist – let us repeat – is the “source and summit”), by means of the dynamic of Eucharistic Congresses, can find an extraordinary but privileged way to re-motivate and form pastoral workers capable of giving a concretely communicative force to *evangelisation* so that it may be “*new in its ardour, in its methods and in its expression.*”⁹⁸

In 1964 the Canadian Catholic scholar Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) intuited that not only “the medium is the *message*”, but that “the medium is the *massage*”, considering the ever more sensorial and ever less rational impact that the *Media* has on persons.⁹⁹ Today – as the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate* underlines – despite the enormous invasive potential of the extensive *network* and its growing subordination to economic calculations, ideology and politics, there remains the possibility that the multimedia system may become “an occasion of humanisation” insofar as “the meaning and finalisation of the *Media* become sought in the anthropological foundation.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *L’Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 9, 2009.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Messaggio per la Giornata delle Comunicazioni Sociali*, May 16, 2010.

⁹⁸ Giovanni Paolo II, *Discourse to the Bishops of CELAM, Insegnamenti*, VI, 1983, p. 698; EC /4/2743.

⁹⁹ Cf. C. Giaccardi, *Immagine della Chiesa e comunicazione mediatica*, Atti della 60^a Assemblea Generale della CEI, Assisi 2009, p. 121-139.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Caritas in veritate*, n. 73.

For this task the Church avails itself of a facilitating element from the moment that the structure of faith is the very structure of communication. In fact, Christian faith attains its relational dynamism from the life of the divine Trinity, which is interpersonal. By means of the Incarnation of the Word and the action of the Holy Spirit (Trinitarian Missions), God enters into human history through being linked to the history of salvation. The biblical God, in fact, is both “*Agápe*” and “*Lógos*”: Charity and Truth, Love and Word, structurally open to communication, because the Truth is “*lógos*” that creates “*diá-logos*”, and hence, communication and communion.¹⁰¹

The *means* and the *message* coincide in the Church’s communicative activity: the Word incarnate is at the same time the *message* and the *means* of salvation, which is realised in the Eucharist. To celebrate the Eucharist, then, signifies *proclaiming* to all the Gospel of redemption and rebirth coming from Christ’s Sacrifice: “*Every time that you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes*”¹⁰² (1 Cor 11:26). This proclamation is not a purely verbal or intellectual communication, but a gift of life that tends to recreate and make the Eucharist *blossom* – that is, Truth and Love – in all members of the Church, “*for the life of the world*” (Jn 6:51).

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¹⁰¹ Cf. *Caritas in veritate*, nn.3-4).

¹⁰² On December 4th 1963 at the end of the second session of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI and the Conciliar Fathers were gathered in the solemn assembly in the Basilica of St Peter (the author of this conference was present as secretary of Cardinal Lercaro), to proclaim the first two documents of the Council: the Constitution “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*” on the Liturgy and the Decree “*Inter mirifica*” on the means of social communication. Someone, rather dismissively but not without some grounds, interpreted the *precedence* given to these documents on topics that were then regarded as “taken for granted” and “harmless” – as a way of gaining necessary time to untie the theological “knots” that resulted in the discussions on the great ecclesial themes during the first Conciliar session. In fact, though, this “*precedence*” and the common contextual place given to the Liturgy and social communication, apart from the possible strategic purpose, were shown to be providential for two reasons: 1) the two issues, apparently unrelated and not crucial, now almost half a century away have assumed, in fact, each in its own place, an ever more relevant role in an awareness of the ecclesial mystery and its proper approach to the world; 2) this linking together of these themes has led to the rediscovery of an intrinsic relationship between “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*” and “*Inter mirifica*”, a relationship that is consistent with the relationship between two essential moments of ecclesial activity: the sacramental celebration and the proclamation of the Christian mystery. In fact, the connection between the “mystery” celebrated and the proclamation of the Gospel spurs on today theological research to deepen the pastoral implications of the alignment between all theology and the sphere of communication, starting from the Liturgy, the source and summit of the Church’s life. (Cf. C. Ruini, *Prefazione*, in C. Giuliodori – G. Lorzio (edd.), *Teologia e comunicazione*, S. Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2001, 5.) Christian life, therefore, nourished by the Liturgy, is not an experience that is exhausted in the anonymity of a selected and hidden silence, but is fully expressed in the salvific mission towards humankind as a whole. (Cf. *L’Eucaristia, Sacramento di ogni salvezza, Documento dottrinale del 23° Congresso Eucaristico Nazionale di Bologna (1997)*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1996, pp. 32-33.) The Second Vatican Council, thus, approaching Liturgy and communication placed the premises for deepening the Christian mystery in the context of the complexity of today’s society, when the world of communication must not remain on the outskirts of pastoral action as if it is an *optional* extra, but it must enter it as a primary and hence relevant and needed component in the service of the Gospel: “*What you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops*” (Mt 10:27). Indubitably, evangelisation today faces great opportunities and “challenges” in a system of communications that has transformed the world not only into a “global village” (always anchored in the “relating of story”), but, with the digital revolution, it has introduced the “*culture hacker*” into the net of nets (Internet), giving life to the “plural village”, which makes one think of the “end of history.” However – the Pope says – “our epoch is at the same time one of *threat* and *promise*,” hence it is necessary to *cooperate* “to guarantee that the promise may prevail over the threat,” interpersonal communication on the flight into the *virtual*. (Cf. Giovanni Paolo II, *Messaggio per la Giornata delle Comunicazioni Sociali 1999*, 4, *Insegnamenti*, XXII, 1, 1999, pp. 281-284.) Certainly for the Church, which continues the work of evangelisation, the stakes are very high. (Cf. E. Vecchi, *Antenna Crucis. Il passaggio dall’analogico al digitale. Riflessione teologico-pastorale*, EDB, Bologna 2010.)