

SPECIAL MOMENTS

(Contemporary Defining Moments)

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INTERTWINED

(An Introduction)

I was only ten years old when India became independent and already seventy six when pope Francis went to Lampedusa: it is a lifetime and an age of momentous changes which I intend to touch by putting in evidence the special moments or better the contemporary defining moments that stand out as the multi-facetted aspects of that change.

Also other special moments are intertwined with the happenings of my life: when I was ordained a priest in 1962, it was the year of the starting of the Second Vatican Council and the declaration of independence of Uganda, the African country which became my adopted homeland for twenty three years. Both those special moments and my twenty fifth birthday fell in October of that year.

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison stands up against the assassination of Benedict Kiwanuka by the bloody dictator Idi Amin Dada in 1971, my first year in Uganda: the self-declared champion of African Independence being more shortsighted in his cruelty than the leaders of the racist apartheid regime who spared Mandela for the change that had to come sooner or later.

I lived the implementation of the decrees of Vatican II in Uganda, a time of excitement when amazing new liturgical songs were composed in the Bantu language of the tribe I was with as a missionary. I followed Paul VI in the Holy Land where I felt very strongly to the point of shedding tears of frustration the hard enmity of the Jews and the Muslims. The attack of the two towers was not far away and the tragedies of terrorism.

The crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism mark the high influence of Karol the Great, Saint John Paul II. His funeral was a triumph for the Catholic Church. But what followed was not so good: globalization has magnified inequality and the crisis of the Catholic Church under the scourge of the child abuse of the clergy is a tragedy without end.

I was assigned to the Philippines after the Edsa Revolution. I arrived when the enthusiasm for that peaceful happening was still high, but I have lived to the present time when an unexpected and disturbing coming back of dictatorship is taking place, under the revived name of Marcos.

All the undigested epochal changes in the social, political and religious situation of our contemporary world tell us that only time and the suffering of generations will bring a new equilibrium and hopefully a better world condition than the present one.

Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

August 1947: The Independence of India

THE END OF COLONIALISM

The colonies of the British Empire fought for the survival of the motherland during World War II. At the end of it, they claimed their own independence. The example was set by India. Graced by the exceptional charisma of Mahatma Gandhi, the champion of non-violent resistance, the Indian people were the first to reach the target. The “wind of change” soon provoked a worldwide domino effect that marked the end of an era.

India's First War of Independence was a revolt of Indian soldiers and people against British rule that started in May 1857 and continued until December 1858. Historians use the term “The Indian Mutiny” to describe this event. It was a landmark in the history of modern India.

Numerous other uprisings and conflicts erupted over the course of the centuries long British occupation, but it wasn't until Mohandas “Mahatma” Gandhi's social efforts, beginning in India from 1915-1920 and onward, that a popular vision of an independent India began to spread among ordinary Indians.

Because of these efforts Gandhi became wildly popular. When Nehru gave his famous Independence speech in 1947, he called Gandhi “The Father of our Nation who... held aloft the torch of freedom and lighted up the darkness that surrounded us”. Gandhi's momentum reached a peak during World War II.

In March 1946, shortly after the close of the War, Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, expressed these sentiments in a speech to the House of Commons: “Is it any wonder that today India claims – as a nation of 400 million people that has twice sent her sons to die for freedom – that she should herself have freedom to decide her own destiny? My colleagues are going to India with the intention to help her to attain that freedom as speedily and fully as possible.”

At midnight of August 15, 1947, India became an independent country and Jawaharlal Nehru took up the position of Prime Minister.

The universal significance of Gandhi

Gandhi's political and spiritual influence on India had been so great, that the British authorities did not dare to interfere with him. Moreover they didn't know how to treat an enemy who didn't use violence. During his imprisonments Gandhi began several times to fast over long periods. His

fasts were effective measures against the British, because if he had died, revolution might well have broken out in India.

Gandhi became a role model for many people. His new policy of truth and non-violence inspired lots of freedom activists like Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela, who learned from his philosophy and used it to fight for their rights and their beliefs. Albert Einstein eulogized Gandhi as one of the most inspiring and influential men of the twentieth century.

Gandhi was also admired because of his simple lifestyle. Wherever he went he wore a self-made loincloth and a shawl. His only nourishment were vegetables, fruit juice and goat's milk. "He lived a spiritual and ascetic life of prayer, fasting and meditation." Through his doctrine and his way of life he gave people in India and all over the world a way to fight for their rights. Indians honored him as a saint and gave him the name "Mahatma", which means 'Great Soul'.

The wind of change

After India was finally granted freedom in 1947, it was apparent that a change in the perceptions of colonial power was occurring. The media played a significant role in showing the brutal reality of colonialism to the masses; in the end, increased media coverage was a catalyst in shifting public perceptions.

In Africa, nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah were inspired by Gandhi's success. Nkrumah's campaign was strikingly similar to the one Gandhi had led in India, and likewise, he was imprisoned for his efforts. Few years later, however, on March 6, 1957, the independent state of Ghana was created and Nkrumah became the first Prime Minister.

The independence of Ghana had a domino effect for the other countries of Africa. In 1960, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Harold Macmillan, delivered a famous speech known as the "Wind of Change": "One of the constant facts of political life in Europe has been the emergence of independent nations... Fifteen years ago this movement spread through Asia... To-day the same thing is happening in Africa... The wind of change

The Bandung Conference, April 1955

AWAKENING

It was the first political Asian-African conference of newly independent countries for the purpose of escaping the polarization between USA and communist Russia. In reality, it became the sign of the awakening of the “colored” peoples in the world scene. Pope Paul VI’s encyclical “Populorum Progressio” prophetically interpreted the demands of this awakening. The consequences of this historical shift appear momentous also for the Catholic Church.

Wars usually bring changes in society and this is especially true of World War II because of the global reach of its combat scenarios. The Allies were forced to involve the citizens of their colonies in the fighting for the survival and the victory of the different “Motherlands”. When the war was successfully over, it was the colonies which stood up to demand their independence.

The acquisition of independence was only the first step towards the claim of their place in the world scene. That would bring a historical shift in the global world panorama. The Bandung Conference is the first consistent manifestation of this momentous change, full of important consequences for the future.

The Bandung Conference

In April 1955, representatives from twenty-nine governments of Asian and African nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to discuss peace, the role of the Third World in the Cold War, economic development and decolonization. The twenty-nine countries represented almost one-quarter of the Earth’ land surface and more than half the world population. Indonesia, India and China played the leading role. Because the decolonization process was still ongoing, the delegate at the conference took it upon themselves to speak for other colonized peoples (especially in Africa) that had not yet established independent governments.

Two observers from the USA were present at the conference, although only in their private capacity, yet they better interpreted its wider valence for the future of humanity. The first was Adam Clayton Powell Jr., a Baptist pastor and the first African American member of the house of representatives. This champion of racial equality, returning to the United States, urged President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Congress to oppose colonialism and pay attention to the priorities of emerging Third World nations.

The other was the African American author Richard Wright. His book on the trip was published as *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*. The accent on the “colored peoples” was also in the best-seller book by an Italian missionary and journalist, Fr. Peter Gheddo, by the title *The awakening of the Colored Peoples* (1956). It was these intellectuals who

perceived the greater importance of the Conference as the symbol of a shift in the world scene. But it was Pope Paul VI that interpreted the demands of this awakening with his encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* (1967).

Worldwide Social Question

Populorum Progressio is a document which cost harsh critiques to pope Montini from the part of those who wanted the pope to remain, as somebody said, the “Chaplain of the West”. The encyclical displayed a prophetic message that found an immediate echo both in Church environments and in the world at large. PP was a document really revolutionary because it looked in the face the social problem which by then had become worldwide and because of the operative guidelines the pope gave which maintain a present day relevance.

Only ten years had passed from the Bandung Conference and that phenomenon which was then called “the Awakening of the Colored Peoples”. The West was abandoning the role of colonial master and was proposing itself as partner of the development of the new nations.

At the end of the XIX century, the Church had given an answer, albeit a bit late, to the social question of the workers’ rights with the *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII. After Vatican II, Paul VI’s document was seizing and putting in evidence the new worldwide dimension of the social problem and consequently exposing the demands of the development of the peoples which was awaiting new and courageous answers.

The new name for peace

Paul VI speaks of the “universal destination of the goods of creation”, a concept which acts as a “social mortgage” on any private property which in this way is no longer absolute. He speaks of an economy which should be at the service of humanity that contrasts with the imperialism of high finance which crashes peoples and reduces them to slavery. A system which increases the profit of the already rich and reduces the masses of the underprivileged to utter misery. It is what we are seeing now in the “the new world order” of globalization.

“Development is the new name of peace”: this famous sentence sums up the whole message of PP and became like the slogan of the emerging nations. Moreover, the worldwide character of the social problem points out the need

of widening the scope of the Church Social Doctrine to include the Development of peoples. The aspirations of the emerging peoples to development are seen as “a sign of the times” in biblical terms.

The original aspect is the essential link between development and peace. This is like the point of arrival in as much as failure to address it can unleash what was called “the anger of the peoples”. Many of the contemporary problems which appear without a solution like the recurrent bouts of terrorism, the apparently unmanageable pressure of immigrations and the continuous presence of dire hunger are consequence of the failure to put into operation the indications that PP gave more than forty years ago.

The Third Church

The changing times saw the Catholic Church substantially happy with the decolonization process. The new nations were showing themselves to the world with their young leaders many times formed in Catholic schools. The colonial powers had prepared the independence by encouraging the Christian missionaries to dedicate their energy mainly to education. Very few new countries, once arrived at their independence, had objected to the presence of foreign missionaries, contrary to the pessimistic fears of many.

The extraordinary moment called for the indigenization of the church leadership and that is exactly what had started happening during the time preceding Vatican II. It took sometime however before the full implications of the awakening of the colored peoples became awareness of an epochal change for the life of the Church itself. Fruit of this awareness was the book of a German missionary, Walbert Buhlman: *The Coming of the Third Church* (1977).

The "First Church" was that of the original disciples and the generations that followed them, centered on the Mediterranean and making the first missionary advances into lands and cultures outside of Israel. The men and women of that First Church bequeathed to us many treasures: the New Testament, the core elements of our worship, our philosophical and theological systems and our commitment to engage in dialogue with the religions, philosophies and cultures of the world.

The missionary endeavors of those early centuries led to the development of the "Second Church," centered in Europe. It was the Church of mass Christianity. Societies and cultures were shaped by the Christian commitment of rulers and people. The "outside world" of non-belief was geographically and psychologically remote, only object of proselytism. We still live in that Church, but increasingly find ourselves moving in a new situation, a new Church, the Third Church.

This new Church is global, but mainly to be found in the South of the world. The statistics tell the story. In 1910, 80 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America. Today, a century later, the majority of us live in Africa, Asia and Latin America, with less than 40 percent of us in the West. In just five years between 2004 and 2009, the number of Catholics in Asia increased by nearly 11 percent.

Exciting Times

What is distinctive about this Church? Western Christians usually do not even notice how deeply their Christianity has been shaped by religious traditions and cultures that pre-dated the preaching of the Gospel in Europe. So too are the Churches of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific being shaped by religions and cultures that preachers of the Gospel encountered there.

That means that ideas of God, of holiness, of worship, of community, of ministry — of everything that makes a Church — are gradually becoming considerably different from what has been "normal" for more than a millennium and a half. Cherished and time honored traditions and formulations of faith are being called into question. The Third Church lives in the midst of varied beliefs or unbelief, with little or decreasing political, social and cultural power. This is leading to new styles of worship, of theologizing, of community, of evangelization.

Much of Catholic history since Vatican II can be read as a series of attempts to protect the Second Church from the changes that are coming with the Third Church. Many times, the phenomenon is ignored. But, love it or fear it, a new Church is being born. It will take several lifetimes, but eventually Christianity throughout the world will be different. No substantially

different, but different. Much of the tension in pope Francis' pontificate should be understood in this context.

Centuries from now we will be looked upon as the early Christians of what will in the future be the normal, everyday way to follow and proclaim Christ. We may be envied for having lived in an exciting time of transition. It would be a shame to miss one of the biggest events in the history of Christianity because we thought the way we have been is the only way to be.

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1964: Pope Paul VI in the Holy Land

RETURN TO THE ORIGIN

Since Saint Peter left Palestine for Rome, no pope had visited the land of Jesus. Popes had dispatched envoys, emissaries and even Crusader armies to it, but it was only Paul VI who decided, 1900 years later, to go back to the Holy Land as a symbolic return to the origin of Christianity, in the context of the Second Vatican Council.

At the end of the second Vatican II session, on December 4 1963, Pope Paul VI made a surprise announcement to the Council fathers: “I would now like to communicate something to you that we have had our hearts set on for some time...After much reflection and having prayed a great deal to the Lord, we have decided to undertake a pilgrimage to that land which was the home of our Lord Jesus Christ ... in order to recall the main mysteries of our salvation, that is incarnation and redemption.”

“We will see that time-honored land,” Paul VI said, “where St. Peter started off from, a land to which none of his successors ever returned. We will return there in a spirit of devout prayer and spiritual renewal to pay the humblest and briefest of visits and offer Christ his Church; to bring our separated Brothers back to the one and holy Church; to ask for divine mercy, in the name of peace”.

A pilgrimage of spiritual renewal

Thus it was that, in the brief space of less than forty-eight hours, from January 5 to 6, 1964, His Holiness Pope Paul VI accomplished a historical visit to the Holy Land, establishing a tradition subsequently honored by his successors. It was the first time a Roman pontiff traveled abroad for over a century, the first time a Roman pontiff flew in an airplane, and especially the first time a Roman pontiff visited Palestine.

The Pope's journey was essentially a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the focal point of reverence and travel for adherents of all the Abrahamic faiths. Christian leaders and faithful have visited Jerusalem since at least the fourth century, encouraged by Emperor Constantine and his saintly mother Helen, recognizing its association with the early apostles, saints and martyrs.

Most especially its significance comes from the fact that it is the place where God's feet once walked when His “Word assumed flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). So, too, Pope Paul traveled to Bethlehem, where Christ was born, Nazareth, where Christ grew up and Jerusalem, where Christ died and rose again.

A pioneering ecumenical encounter

Nevertheless, the "pilgrim pope" was also the "ecumenical pope". On January 5, 1964, Pope Paul VI met with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras on the Mount of Olives. It was the first time the Western pontiff and the Eastern primate, the Pope of Rome and the Archbishop of the New Rome, Constantinople, met face-to-face since 1438 at the Council of Florence.

And the venue for the encounter was on the Mount of Olives, the very place where our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great High-Priest, addressed His Father on the night of His betrayal, for the unity of His followers, boldly and passionately praying that "His disciples may be one" (John 17:21).

The Melting Away of Silence

The main contact of the momentous event was held in the Apostolic Delegation residence on the Mount of Olives, where the Pope awaited and received the Patriarch. The two leaders embraced one another in a gracious historical gesture that – to quote the official report submitted subsequently to the Holy and Sacred Synod on January 20, 1964 – "melted away centuries of silence between their respective Churches".

"A milestone and the dawn of a new Christendom was consecrated at that moment, when the attention of the entire Christian world was focused on the City of love and reconciliation, while the hearts of all well-intentioned people were beating in anticipation as they waited to hear the message of unity and fraternity in Christ."

Pope Paul VI addressed the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square to welcome him back to Rome on January 6, 1964, in this way: "You must appreciate that my trip was not just a unique spiritual event. It has proven to be an event of great historical significance. It is a link in the eternal chain of tradition. Who knows? It could also be the herald of new events of great and abundant benefit to the Church and humanity."

Healing relationships

With that historic trip, the era of the stay-at-home pope came to an end. It disappeared for good when the globe-trotting John Paul II became pontiff in 1978. Still, it took John Paul more than two decades as pope, and trips to dozens of other countries, before he appeared in the Holy Land in 2000. When he did, it was a huge success. The pope was warmly embraced by

December 8, 1965: The Conclusion of Vatican II

THE WATERSHED

The solemn liturgy that concluded the Second Vatican Council showed the importance of this exceptional event of the Catholic Church in the XX century. Vatican II marked the point of arrival of the huge missionary movement that brought Christianity to the ends of the world and the moral ascendancy of the modern papacy. At the same time it denotes the beginning of the challenges that the present Church has to face.

On December 8, 1965, the solemnity of Mary Immaculate, a spectacular liturgical ceremony signed the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). In front of Saint Peter's basilica, pope Paul VI presided the solemn mass together with the 2500 Council Fathers i.e. the bishops of the whole Catholic World, the non-Catholic invited observers, the council officials, the civil dignitaries and an overwhelming crowd of faithful who filled Saint Peter's square to capacity.

The pope in his homily greeted the world in the name of the Council as if introducing it to the Council's abundant fruits: "This greeting is, first all, universal. It is extended and broadened to the entire world. How could it be otherwise if this council was said to be and is ecumenical, that is to say, universal? From this Catholic center of Rome, no one, in principle, is unreachable; in principle, all people can and must be reached.

For the Catholic Church, no one is a stranger, no one is excluded, no one is far away. Every one to whom our greeting is addressed is one who is called, who is invited and who, in a certain sense, is present. This is the language of the heart of one who loves. Every loved one is present! And we, especially at this moment, in virtue of our universal pastoral and apostolic mandate, we love all, all people....

Our greeting tends to strengthen and, if necessary, to produce a spiritual relationship whence it draws its meaning and its voice. Ours is a greeting, not of farewell which separates, but of friendship which remains. It is even precisely in this last expression that our greeting would desire to reach the heart of every man, to enter therein as a cordial guest and speak in the interior silence of your individual souls, the habitual and ineffable words of the Lord: "Peace be with you!".

God' dream for humanity

Here Paul VI became almost poetic in his passion to make humanity understand that something new and great had happened: "Behold, this is our greeting. May it rise as a new spark of divine charity in our hearts, a spark

which may enkindle the principles, doctrine and proposals which the council has organized and which, thus inflamed by charity, may really produce in the Church and in the world that renewal of thoughts, activities, conduct, moral force and hope and joy which was the very scope of the council.

Consequently, our greeting is in the ideal order. Is it a dream? Is it poetry? Is it only a conventional and meaningless exaggeration, as often happens in our day-to-day expression of good wishes? No. This greeting is ideal, but not unreal because man preserves an unquenchable yearning toward ideal and total perfection, although of himself he is incapable of reaching it”.

At the end of the mass, the messages of the Council to the various categories were consigned to lay representatives. It was touching to see that, in his solitude, Jacques Maritain, the great Catholic philosopher, had a moment of glory when pope Paul VI, his pupil and admirer, who had invited him as observer to the Council, entrusted the "*Message to Men of Thought and of Science*" to him.

To bear witness to the light

Just a few years after the upheaval of World War II, The Western world had experienced a stupefying technical, scientific, and economic expansion that had given countless people occasion to put their trust in material goods even while other millions of people lived in devastating poverty and suffering.

Militant atheism abounded, and the world was undergoing a grave spiritual crisis. The Church's response to the crisis of humanity as it manifested itself in the middle of the twentieth century parallels what John's Gospel says about John the Baptist: "He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him”.

The time of Vatican II represented the peak for the Catholic Church. Very soon the implementation of the Council especially in the reforms regarding its internal life(e.g. Priests and Religious) brought about an unexpected wind of rebellion that gave origin to the largest exodus of priests and religious to be compared only with what happened at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Dogmatic and moral theologians ventured in uncharted and controversial fields causing reaction and polarization in the Catholic Church. The implementation of the Council was the commitment and the anguish of the popes: the subtle and tormented Blessed Paul VI and especially the

powerful and charismatic Saint John Paul II in his very long pontificate of 27 years and of Benedict XVI. It is still the challenge of pope Francis.

Upbeat against crisis and confusion

In a way, that's not surprising. Blessed John Henry Newman, eminent 19th century British convert and theologian, once remarked that it was "rare" for an ecumenical council not to be followed by "great confusion." "The century following each council has ever been a time of great trial," Cardinal Newman said at the time of Vatican Council I (1869-70). He added that Vatican I "seems likely to be no exception." And so it was with Vatican II.

Several years after its close, the French theologian Father Yves Congar, himself a major influence on Vatican II's thinking, wrote that the council had "many very substantial fruits." But it also had another, unexpected result: in opening up doors and windows in the Church, he said, "the crisis also entered".

In 1985 a Special Synod of Bishops was convened to evaluate the impact of the Council and its implementation. The evaluation was substantially positive. John Paul II had expressed the same position earlier the same year: "Vatican II remains the fundamental happening of the contemporary Church: fundamental in order to deepen the spiritual riches entrusted to her by Christ himself who through her and by means of her prolongs and shares with us human beings the *Mysterium Salutis* (The Mystery of Salvation), his redeeming work. Fundamental also for the fruitful contact with the contemporary world for the purpose of evangelization and dialogue at all levels and with all people of good will".

The coming of the Third Millennium

A very important moment in the life of the contemporary Church was the celebration of the great jubilee of the 2000 years of Christianity when Pope John Paul II officially asked forgiveness for the sins of the Church committed in the previous centuries and once again managed to visit the Holy Land and perform emotional signs of dialogue with the Jews and the Moslems.

The preparation of the Great Jubilee stimulated the search and documentation about the Christians who had witnessed Christ through

martyrdom. An impressive documentation was collected that showed how the XX century had been a century of martyrs.

The fundamental orientations of Vatican II constitute the official position of the Church in its leadership and in the body of the faithful: Ecumenism and the search for unity among the Christians, respect and tolerance and dialogue towards the non-Christian religions and acceptance of the principle of freedom in the civil life of society and collaboration with the positive forces in society for justice and peace.

But new challenges to Christian life and the life of the Church are again appearing in the world's changed circumstances.

The population explosion and the movement of migration have increased considerably the non-Christian population of the world and brought large numbers of non Christians into the traditional areas of Christianity especially in Europe. The process of secularization and the spreading of materialism and consumerism has eroded the Christian practice in Europe and North America.

Christ is the Lord of history

A wave of militant atheism is claiming the minds of the members of the developed countries. Pope Benedict XVI was the champion in the fight against "Relativism" or the lack of absolute truths in the understanding of the world and life and in the moral world. The wrong enlargement of the concept of Human Rights to abortion, practicing homosexuality and assisted suicide is creating a gap between the position of the Catholic Church and the life practice of large sectors of the population.

Reaction to the past colonization often becomes persecution for the Christian communities in countries in which they are minority. The pressure of Islam is reducing almost to zero the Christian presence in the Middle East and especially in Palestine.

The conciliatory attitude of the Catholic Church in ecumenical matter has offered a weak flank to the unforeseen attack of very numerous new Protestant sects totally alien to ecumenism. But it is the lack of vocations to the diocesan priesthood that is perhaps the greatest threat to her survival and progress in the future.

The times of optimism seem to have past, notwithstanding the strong witness of joy and the popularity of pope Francis. The Catholic Church appears to

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February 1986: The Edsa Revolution

A LOST OPPORTUNITY

In 1986, the uprising of a people united by their faith against an encroached dictator drew the admiration of the whole world. More the thirty years later, the disappointment of the people for the failed promises of social justice give way to the coming back of the same dictator as a national hero and the enduring rule of the aristocracy of the rich.

On early November 1985, the dictator Ferdinand Marcos surprised everyone by declaring his willingness to hold a "snap" election. In this way he meant to take the opposition by surprise. The discontent in the Philippines against him had grown exponentially since the assassination of Ninoy Aquino, the leader of the opposition. Confident that the opposition, fractured by deep ideological divisions, had no chance, Marcos set the election for February 7, 1986.

On February 15, 1986, amid cries of foul from the opposition, the National Assembly declared Marcos the winner. Nevertheless Radio Veritas continued coverage of the NAMFREL count which showed Marcos losing. On February 22, Radio Veritas broadcasted a conference by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Acting Army Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos which declared Marcos to be the loser.

The power of prayer

Cardinal Sin, speaking over Radio Veritas that night, urged the people to be calm and pray for a just and peaceful resolution to the crisis. He called on civilians to protect Camp Aguinaldo and Camp Crame where Enrile and Ramos were taking their stand with some four hundred armed supporters.

His plea struck a responsive chord in the nation and within hours, thousands gathered outside the camp gates. By Sunday night, their numbers had grown to over a million, forming a human barricade, led by sisters waving rosaries, that the soldiers and tanks sent by Marcos refused to attack. In front of the eyes of the whole world, the peaceful EDSA Revolution had prevailed.

In a similar way, three years later, in a larger scale, the peaceful collapse of communism was represented by the people climbing on top of the Berlin wall and knocking it down. In both cases it appeared as the triumph of spiritual power, the power of prayer.

The 1986 popular revolt, led by Aquino's widow, Corazon, sent the ailing Marcos and his family fleeing to Hawaii, finally restoring democracy to the Philippines. In the wake of the peaceful "People Power" uprising, the

carefully manufactured figure of a courageous war hero-turned-leader concerned only for his people quickly fell apart, and his powerful wife became a figure of ridicule. Marcos died in Hawaii in 1989 as one of the most despised rulers of the Philippines.

The astonishing come back

By an irony of history, last year, his astonishing come back was sealed when the dictator was finally buried at Libingan ng Mga Bayani (*The Burial Ground of the Heroes*), after the Supreme Court endorsed a decision by President Duterte, a friend of the Marcos family, to allow the burial.

Bishop Soc Villegas, who had lived the exciting days of the Edsa Revolution at the side of the charismatic Cardinal Sin, now cries like the exiles “by the rivers of Babylon” (Psalm 137): “Thirty-one years after Edsa, I hear our people ask: What shall we celebrate? What is there to celebrate? By the corner of Edsa and Hortigas, I want to sit and weep as I remember the four glorious days of February 1986. The glory now flickers in the darkness of fear and terror again. The bloodless revolt is now stained by the blood in our streets, the blood of the relentless killing of the poor... The plunderers are now heroes... It is a nightmare. It is a shame!” (*Open letter to Cardinal Sin*, February 2017).

Unfortunately, the tears now come too late. Edsa was a missed opportunity: enthusiasm, unity, dreams then, but more than thirty years later the bitter truth is that the governments of the heroes of the Edsa Revolution have betrayed the people, the poor: no real land reform, no living salaries, no health provisions for the working class and the poor, no fight against drugs and very little against corruption.

“Musical Chairs”

The present administration, with all the noise of change, is not doing differently: the war on drugs is so weird that it is only promoting impunity in the holders of power. The coming back of the family of the ousted dictator spells doom for a different, better future. The incumbent president hobnobbing with the Marcoses shows that it is the traditional dynasties that are alternating on the seat of power and in so doing they resemble the game of “musical chairs”.

The most scathing article describing this situation was published by Rina Jimenez-David, commenting the celebration of the birthday of one of the

protagonists, by the title: “A *lineup of villains*”: “Indeed, the photos of the occupants of the head table at the recent 80TH birthday of former president Erap Estrada reminded many of the opening scene of the first “Godfather” movie: the crème de la crème of Mafiosi gathered at a wedding banquet”.

“Not one of them is untouched by allegation of corruption; house arrest and at least one conviction spice up their collective resume. “They are the reason the Philippines remain poor” said a commenter in FB, giving the public a capsule lesson in recent Philippine history”.

The same gathering of the usual leaders was also at the 60th marriage anniversary of Enrile. The country is firmly handled by the traditional lords and the ideal value of the Edsa Revolution remains as a reproach to a ruling class that has failed to involve the majority of the citizen in the benefits of social progress.

I like to conclude with the sedated words of Cardinal Tagle. He noted that “the Edsa Revolution was an event of people relying on their faith for social transformation. In full view of the world, the Filipino people showed the power of prayer that begets courage, that begets solidarity, that begets change”. He concluded: “More than thirty years later, we thank God for the gift of faith, as we also ask pardon for our personal and communal failure in consistently living that faith in justice, love and peace”.

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Meeting of Assisi, October 27, 1986

THE POWER OF PRAYER

It was the first occasion of such kind in the history of the world: a meeting of all religions to pray for peace in the city of Saint Francis. It was the most original and courageous initiative of saint John Paul II, a milestone in the way of dialogue which has been defined: the true cultural revolution.

Pope John Paul II was a magnificent defender of the sacredness of human life, marriage and family, and the dignity of women, in a host of inspiring encyclicals and other writings. He was hugely instrumental in bringing about the fall of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. He was a wonderful communicator of the Faith to young people at the World Youth Days he instituted.

How many young men and women have decided to dedicate themselves to the priesthood and religious life as a result of attending one of these occasions. There is much more that could be cited in the saintly pope's favor, yet his most original and courageous initiative is the Meeting of Assisi of October 27, 1986.

John Paul II was convinced that continuous dialogue between different denominations and religions was the most effective means of bringing about mutual understanding and reconciliation. He knew that people who shared belief in a supernatural reality could come together, find common ground, and pray communally for peace. He also knew, however, that only the Roman Pontiff, by virtue of his particular situation and prestige, has sufficient clout among world religious leaders to call a gathering of this kind.

Saint John Paul II, therefore, in great apprehension about the level of strife and warfare in the world (it must be remembered that in 1986 the whole of Eastern Europe was under the grip of the former Soviet Union, with its enormous arsenal of nuclear weapons still targeting the West), courageously decided to promote a movement to strengthen the cause of peace throughout the world: an ecumenical gathering to pray for peace.

In the city of Saint Francis

He decided that the best place from which to launch this initiative was Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, the saint of universal brotherhood and of love for all creatures. In this way on October 27, 1986, Pope John Paul II succeeded, for the first time in history, in bringing together 160 religious leaders from all over the world: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians, as well as representatives of Hinduism, Sikhism,

Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, African and North American animists, Shinto, Zoroastrians and Baha'i.

They represented 32 Christian religious organizations and 11 other non-Christian world religions. The meeting was a milestone event which gave enormous impetus to the worldwide peace movement, and at the conclusion of the event, Pope John Paul said, "For the first time in history, we have come together from everywhere, Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and World Religions, in this sacred place dedicated to Saint Francis, to witness before the world, each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace".

Since then it has been renewed each year and has seen the presence of pope Benedict XVI for the 25th anniversary in 2011, and that of pope Francis for the 30th anniversary in 2016. The past 30 years have included points of strength and weakness. People have become more aware of the need to attain cohesion and integration. There have been several international initiatives which significantly indicate that religion is an inevitable factor which genuinely contributes to harmony among peoples.

Yet, these bright images were concomitant with bleak and painful ones whereby terrorist groups have emerged with people recruited to kill and torment others in the name of religion and God. Prayer is more than ever necessary to promote peace and to overcome the culture of violence. In this context, the praise goes to the Community of Saint Egidio, a Catholic lay movement, which has organized ecumenical prayers among different religions every year after Assisi 1986. It has kept alive the "Spirit of Assisi".

The "Spirit of Assisi"

The first to use this phrase was Pope John Paul himself during a speech on October 29, 1986. The Pope had just received a group of representatives of some non-Christian religions who had been with him in Assisi two days before, and who, before returning home, wished to see him again. John Paul reminded them of the importance of the Assisi event, and thanked them for their participation.

He then concluded his speech with these words, "You are about to return to your various homes and centres. I thank you again for coming

1989: The crumbling of the Berlin Wall

SUDDENLY BY IMPLOSION

The year 1989 saw the sudden collapse of Communism, symbolized by the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. As the strongest point of the Iron Curtain, it had become the symbol of the suppression of freedom. Its quiet demise was received by the world with a sigh of relief.

In 1989, a series of radical political changes occurred in Europe, in the Communist Eastern Bloc, associated with the liberalization of the Eastern Bloc's authoritarian systems and the erosion of political power in the pro-Soviet governments in nearby Poland and Hungary. After several weeks of civil unrest, the East German government announced on November 9, 1989 that all citizens of the Democratic Republic of Germany could visit West Germany and West Berlin.

Crowds of East Germans crossed and climbed onto the Wall, joined by West Germans on the other side in a celebratory atmosphere. Over the next few weeks, euphoric people and souvenir hunters chipped away parts of the Wall; the governments later used industrial equipment to remove most of what was left. The fall of the Berlin Wall paved the way for German reunification, which was formally concluded on October 3, 1990.

The noisy and frightful communist phenomenon which had started seventy years before did not end “with a bang but with a whisper” as T.S. Eliot would say. It ended by implosion: the end of the Soviet Communism happened without bloodshed, by inner destabilization and consumption. If we think that less than fifty years before, in that very place, the collapse of Nazism had happened in an apocalyptic scenario of war and destruction, we cannot fail to perceive a kind of miracle.

Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter “*Centesimus Annus*” (1991), while commemorating the end of a century since the land-mark document of Leo XIII “*Rerum Novarum*”, dedicates a whole chapter by the title “1989” to this defining event. He attributes the peaceful end of the communist threat to prayer. The Blessed Virgin Mary, at Fatima, had exhorted to pray for the conversion of Russia and had declared: “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will prevail”.

The momentous landmark signed the victory of freedom and characteristically deserved to become a chapter in the famous letter mentioned above of one of the protagonists, pope Saint John Paul II. Less than forty years later, however, the expectations of the world are sorely disappointed. The collapse of Communism and the victory of freedom have not brought the prosperity, equality and wholesome progress they promised.

The Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall was a barrier that divided Berlin from 1961 to 1989. Constructed by the German Democratic Republic, the Wall completely cut off by land West Berlin from surrounding East Germany and from East Berlin. The barrier included guard towers placed along large concrete walls, which circumscribed a wide area (later known as the "death strip") that contained anti-vehicle trenches, "fakir beds" and other defenses.

Along with the separate and much longer Inner German border, which divided East from West Germany, it came to symbolize the "Iron Curtain" that separated Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. The West Berlin city government sometimes referred to it as the "Wall of Shame", a term coined by mayor Willy Brandt.

The Eastern Bloc claimed that the Wall was erected to protect its population from fascist elements conspiring to prevent the "will of the people" in building a socialist state in East Germany. In practice, the Wall served to prevent the massive emigration and defection that had marked East Germany and the communist Eastern Bloc during the post-World War II period.

Between 1961 and 1989, the Wall prevented almost all such emigration. During this period, around 5,000 people attempted to escape over the Wall, with an estimated death toll ranging from 136 to more than 200 in and around Berlin.

The Fall of the Wall

The beginning of the end started when, in the Soviet Union, the so called *Perestroika* came into existence and eventually prevailed. *Perestroika* was a political movement for reformation within the Russian Communist Party during the 1980s, widely associated with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his *glasnost* (meaning "openness") policy reform.

The literal meaning of perestroika is "restructuring", referring to the restructuring of the Soviet political and economic system. It was an attempt to respond to the opposition to the Communist system caused by the popular visit of pope John Paul II to Poland and the consequent success of the "Solidarity" workers' union of Lech Walesa that provoked the peaceful rejection of the socialist government under the control of Moscow.

Perestroika is rightly thought to be the cause of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe, and the end of the Cold War. As the East Germans swarmed through the border, they were greeted by West Germans waiting with flowers and champagne amid wild rejoicing. Soon afterward, a crowd of West Berliners jumped on top of the Wall, and were soon joined by East German youngsters. They danced together to celebrate their new freedom. That practically signed the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Unbridled commercial freedom

The Berlin Wall was intended to keep out the negative influence of the corrupt West in order for the experiment of the communist state to succeed. In reality, it was built to stop the people of East Europe to escape from the communist “paradise”. The Berlin Wall was the symbol of the lack of freedom. The Iron Curtain was imprisoning its inhabitants and turning the communist state into a jail.

The crumbling of the Berlin Wall was the triumph of freedom. At the moment when it happened, to the exalted population, it appeared as totally positive. But in the following years, the unbridled commercial freedom contributed to the practical collapse of the national borders under the impact of globalization. The unlimited abundance of consumer goods chased away penury, but also equality. Enormous amount of wealth is now in the hands of the few and the masses of the disenfranchised are growing exponentially all over the world.

John Paul II evidently considered his encyclical letter “*Centesimus Annus*” as a new “*Rerum Novarum*”. Leo XIII had laid down the framework of social justice according to the Church’s teaching. John Paul II analyses the failure of the communist system, built of principles opposite to those of the social teaching of the Church, on the background of the success of Western Europe. The Christian Democratic Parties had built the most egalitarian and progressive society, thus conferring an immense moral authority to the pope’s social teaching.

Walls are going up again

Paradoxically, one enduring feature of the communist society which has survived the implosion of the Soviet state is the atheism of its population. Brought up in the absence of God to a materialistic outlook, the result of the

crumbling of the Berlin Wall was not a religious revival but a craving for the material goods that the capitalist society was promising and delivering.

The Catholic Church which had not only survived during the persecution but thrived, found itself in demobilization. The winter of vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life joined the dwindling mass attendance. The combination of freedom, availability of consumer goods and the sexual revolution revealed itself deadly poisonous for religion.

The walls are going up again in Europe and not only in Europe in the futile attempt of stopping the movement of the masses of poor people, the immigrants from the South of the world, overwhelmed by a kind of mass hysteria provoked by the social media now widely available to everybody, contributing to the dream of a better life in the North of the world.

Not only the relative stability and prosperity of the European countries are threatened by the unstoppable tidal wave of the economic refugees, but the survival of their religious and cultural identity is endangered by the unexpected and unmanageable phenomenon.

The principle of freedom that the Catholic Church embraced with Vatican II and the disposition of tolerance and inclusion do not seem to work with a runaway world. The missionary edge is blunted and the initiative of conversions has passed to the Evangelicals who do not care about ecumenism and dialogue, but are aggressive with their simple brand of biblical Christianity.

The principle of resistance

Pastoral strategy of mercy is self-defeating for expansion and even for the simple maintenance of the *status quo*. Christianity and mission have always thrived in resistance to the spirit of the world (Cf. *Fuga mundi*: the escape from the world of Monasticism).

Pope John Paul II's letter is prophetic in its criticism of the unbridled capitalism that is the consequence of the end of the polarization of the Cold War and which actually happened with globalization. He already speaks of "Human Ecology", a concept which will be developed by the teaching of Benedict XVI and of the destruction of the habitat which was developed by the famous letter of pope Francis "*Laudato si*".

[illegible]

February 1990: The release from prison of Nelson Mandela

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Hero of his people's anti-apartheid struggle, Nelson Mandela(1918-2013)became South Africa's first democratically elected president. In working to free his country from racial division, he led an essentially peaceful revolution. Mandela has surely been venerated by more millions in his lifetime than any other political figure in history.

Nelson Mandela, leader of the movement to end South African apartheid, was released from prison after 27 years on February 11, 1990. This unexpected “miracle” drew the attention of the whole world. People everywhere let out a sigh of relief and immediately understood that Nelson Mandela would lead his beloved country gradually but peacefully to equality and democracy.

Four hours after leaving prison, Mandela arrived in Cape Town to address more than fifty thousand people gathered outside the city hall. Mandela called on the international community to maintain its sanctions. "I have carried the idea of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. I hope to live to see the achievement of that ideal. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die," he shouted.

These words echoed the famous declaration he made when he was arrested, 27 years before, and he thought he would be condemned to death. This shows that the years in prison had not bent his determination but strengthened it.

Mandela once observed that some people are made by prison, others are broken by it. He, of course, was made by it. Which is what made him, in turn, a man for whom it was worth waiting. With hindsight, Mandela used the fiery address also to take up a negotiating position and convince the black majority that he had not made a secret pact with the authorities.

The double struggle

In 1944, Nelson Mandela, a lawyer, at the age of 26, joined the African National Congress (ANC), the oldest black political organization in South Africa, where he was chosen as the leader of Johannesburg's youth wing. In 1952, he became deputy national president of the ANC, advocating nonviolent resistance to apartheid: South Africa's institutionalized system of white supremacy and racial segregation.

However, after the massacre of peaceful black demonstrators at Sharpeville in 1960, Nelson helped organize a paramilitary branch of the ANC to engage in guerrilla warfare against the white minority government. He

said: "A freedom fighter learns the hard way that it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle, and the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor. At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire."

About that time Mandela was living on a farm in Rivonia, a suburb north of Johannesburg. His wife Winnie brought him an old air rifle for target practice. One day, he shot a sparrow with it and was mortified when the five-year-old son of a friend complained to him, saying: "Why did you kill that bird? Its mother will be sad." "My mood immediately shifted from one of pride to shame," Mandela recalled. "I felt that this small boy had far more humanity than I did. It was an odd sensation for a man who was the leader of a nascent guerrilla army."

The Long walk to freedom

After been arrested twice before, in June 1964, he was convicted of sabotage along with several other ANC leaders and sentenced to life in prison. Mandela spent the first 18 of his 27 years in jail at the brutal Robben Island Prison. Confined to a small cell without a bed or plumbing, he was forced to do hard labor in a quarry. He could write and receive a letter once every six months, and once a year he was allowed to meet with a visitor for 30 minutes. The other years he was at house arrest.

Perhaps the abandonment of his family was his greatest trial during the prison years. The most agonizing experience he suffered in this respect was the death of his eldest son, Thembi, in a car accident. As an adult Thembi had never visited Mandela in prison, seemingly out of a sense of resentment towards his father. Mandela's account of how he battled to contain his grief provides the most moving moment in Mandela's autobiography, "*A Long Walk to Freedom*".

In 1989, F.W. de Klerk became South African president and set about dismantling apartheid. He lifted the ban on the ANC, suspended executions, and in February 1990 ordered the release of Nelson Mandela. Later he declared: "If we had not changed in the manner we did, South Africa would be completely isolated. Internally, we would have the equivalent of civil war. The legacy of Mandela – reconciliation – urgently needed to be revived."

This is why they kept Mandela alive like the British did with Jomo Kenyatta to become the father of independent Kenya.

Reconciliation in action

In 1993, Mandela and de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. One year later, the ANC won an electoral majority in the country's first free elections, and Mandela was elected South Africa's president. Mandela retired from politics in 1999, but remained a global advocate for peace and social justice until his death in December 2013.

Mandela has been above all the person of reconciliation, of the effort of forgiving, even without the condition of reciprocity, with the purpose of uniting a people, knocking down barriers of separation. He managed to do it, giving his country one of the most advanced Constitutional Charter which upholds the rights of all members of the innumerable ethnic units of South Africa.

Another way of understanding South Africa is to recognize it as something of an Old Testament story, a tale of a people struggling to do right but failing time and time again. In the second half of the 20th century, these people had need of a unifying figure to give them a vision of nationhood.

Mandela saw the need, understood and assumed the role demanded and gave his life for his people. There lies his greatness, and hence the tears that flew at his death, in the much beloved country and around the world.

[illegible]

September 11, 2001: The Attack to the Manhattan Twin
Towers

ARMAGEDDON

The 9/11/2001 attack to the Manhattan Twin Tower was totally unexpected, highly successful and shocking. It had a symbolic meaning and it marked the insurgence of the Islamic terrorism which has affected the whole world.

The Twin Towers attack was a series of four coordinated assaults by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Four passenger airliners all of which departed from airports in the northeastern United States bound for California – were hijacked by 19 al-Qaeda terrorists.

Two of the planes were crashed into the North and South towers, respectively, of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. Within an hour and 42 minutes, both the 110-story towers collapsed, with debris and the resulting fires causing partial or complete collapse of all other buildings in the World Trade Center complex, as well as significant damage to ten other large surrounding structures.

A third plane was crashed into the Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia, leading to a partial collapse of the building's western side.

The fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, was initially steered toward Washington, D.C., but crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after its passengers tried to overcome the hijackers. The attacks killed 2,996 people, injured over 6,000 others, and caused at least \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage.

Suspicion quickly fell on al-Qaeda. The United States responded by launching the War on Terror and invading Afghanistan to depose the Taliban, which had harbored al-Qaeda. Many countries strengthened their anti-terrorism legislation and expanded the powers of law enforcement and intelligence agencies to prevent terrorist attacks.

Although al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, initially denied any involvement, in 2004 he claimed responsibility for the attacks. Al-Qaeda and bin Laden cited U.S. support of Israel, the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, and sanctions against Iraq as motives. After evading capture for almost a decade, Osama bin Laden was located and killed in Pakistan in May 2011.

Symbolic attacks

Prior to 2001, the World Trade Center was an icon of New York City, and the Twin Towers were the centerpiece that represented the entire complex. The Twin Towers were widely considered to be symbols of America's power and influence. The Pentagon is the headquarters of the US Department of Defence. If you want to humble an empire it makes sense to maim its

cathedrals. They are symbols of its faith, and when they crumple and burn, it tells us that it is not so powerful and can't be safe.

The stubborn decision to exclude the Muslim religion from the responsibility which was instead put on a small minority of fundamentalists has paid good dividends: the attempts of the Isis to form an Islamic State have resulted in universal condemnation and a war in order to dismantle it. Nowadays, even all the Muslim countries have reacted to the terrorists and made their efforts to coalesce a fundamentalist Islamic state null and void.

But that doesn't take away the ingrained violence which is in the Muslim religion. This is shown by the unending acts of violence against the Christian churches in all the Muslim countries, be it Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, etc. This congenital violence causes unknown Muslims everywhere to attack and kill with any possible means: knives, firearms, even cars and vans and especially by acting as suicide bombers.

The Regensburg lecture

The Regensburg Lecture was delivered on 12 September 2006 by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg in Germany. It was entitled "*Faith, Reason and the University — Memories and Reflections*". The lecture is considered to be among the most important papal statements on world affairs since John Paul II's 1995 address to the United Nations, and sparked international reactions and controversy.

In his lecture, the Pope quoted a passage about Islam made at the end of the 14th century by Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologos. Pope Benedict used Manuel II's argument in order to draw a distinction between the Christian view that "not acting reasonably is contrary to God's nature", and an allegedly Islamic view that God transcends any concept even rationality. At the end of his lecture, the Pope said: "It is to the great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures."

The quotation of the emperor was rather brutal and run like this: "*Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only bad and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.*" The reaction of the Muslim world was enormous and caused not only a never ending diplomatic exchange to and fro, but ironically (although pitifully) so much violence of the Muslim against the Christians that the statement of the emperor was shown to be true.

April 8, 2005: The Funeral of pope John Paul II

A PRIEST TO THE LAST

The greatest gathering of Catholic faithful ever took place on the occasion of the last farewell to late pope John Paul II. The peaceful and devout behavior of the immense crowd of mourners bespeaks of the holiness of the deceased as well as the universal outreach of the Church.

The funeral of Pope John Paul II was held on April 8, 2005, six days after his death on April 2. He had passed the last years of his extraordinary long pontificate being increasingly incapacitated by Parkinson disease and other painful complications. Death, when it came, also for the great pope was a liberation.

The body of John Paul II was exposed first in the Papal Residence and venerated by the Clergy, after which it was placed in St. Peter's Basilica. Then, the faithful who had gathered in St. Peter's Square, were allowed to enter the Basilica to pray before the exposed body. The Swiss Guard remained always beside the body while it was exposed for viewing. By April 6, a million people had seen John Paul II's remains lying in state in St. Peter's Basilica.

Applause rang out in the wind-whipped square as John Paul's plain cypress coffin, adorned with a cross and an "M" for the Virgin Mary, was brought out from St. Peter's Basilica by the papal gentlemen and placed on a carpet in front of the altar for the Requiem Mass. The book of the Gospel was placed on the coffin and the breeze fluttered its pages.

Drowned out by applause

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, dean of the College of Cardinals, a close confidant of John Paul and who became his successor, presided over the Requiem Mass. After the Gospel, he stood up to preach and referred to John Paul as our "late beloved pope" in a homily that traced the pontiff's life from his days as a factory worker in Nazi-occupied Poland to his final days as the head of the world's more than one billion Catholics.

The usually reserved German-born Ratzinger choked up as he recalled one of John Paul's last public appearances. He said: "None of us can ever forget how in that last Easter Sunday of his life, the Holy Father, marked by suffering, came once more to the window of the Apostolic Palace and one last time gave his blessing. We can be sure that our beloved pope is standing today at the window of the Father's house, that he sees us and blesses us. Yes, bless us, Holy Father. We entrust your dear soul to the Mother of God, your Mother, who guided you each day and who will guide you now to the eternal glory of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ".

Cardinal Ratzinger became emotional in other parts of his homily, especially in reflection of the inability of Pope John Paul to speak in the last days of his

life. He said John Paul was a “priest to the last” and said that had offered his life for God and his flock “especially amid the sufferings of his final months.”

Altogether, the homily was interrupted ten times with outbursts of applause. The Nicene Creed sung in the Latin language followed the homily. The prayers of the faithful were offered in Italian, French, Swahili, Tagalog, Polish, German, and Portuguese, showing the breath of universality of the Catholic Church.

“Santo Subito”

After the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the crowds burst into applause, waving flags and banners, chanting, "Santo Subito!" which means "Saint now!" Then, the Papal Gentlemen carried the Pope's coffin towards the entrance of St. Peter's for interment. At the door, the coffin was turned 180 degrees to face the congregation and the cameras, and the crowd applauded and cheered with more fervor their farewell, before it was taken out of the public view for the last time.

Pope John Paul's funeral brought together what was, at the time, the single largest gathering in history of heads of state outside the United Nations. Four kings, five queens, at least seventy presidents and prime ministers, and more than fourteen leaders of other religions attended, alongside the faithful. It is likely to have been one of the largest single gathering of Christianity in history, with numbers estimated in excess of four million mourners gathering in Rome alone.

Turbans, fezzes, yarmulkes, black lace veils, or mantillas, joined the “zucchettos,” or skull caps of Catholic prelates on the steps of St. Peter’s in an extraordinary mix of different people from around the world. “I’m here because I’m a believer but also to live a moment in history,” said Stephan Aubert, wearing a French flag draped over his shoulders.

Rome itself was at a standstill as extraordinary security measures were put in place. Since the beginning, a ban on vehicle traffic in the city center took effect. Airspace was closed, and anti-aircraft batteries outside the city were on alert. Naval ships patrolled both the Mediterranean coast and the Tiber near Vatican City, the tiny sovereign city-state encompassed by the Italian capital.

Rome groaned under the weight of visitors. Side streets were clogged in a permanent pedestrian rush hour, mostly by young people with backpacks.

Tent camps sprang up at the Circus Maximus and elsewhere around the city to take the spillover from hotels. Immense digital screens were hoisted at several sites in Rome and at especially designated campsites outside the city for the millions of mourners and pilgrims.

Greatness in black and white

The funeral was the unique testimony of the greatness and holiness of a Church leader that has left an indelible mark in the history of the Church in the beginning of the XXI century. He was canonized, together with John XXIII by pope Francis on April 27, 2014, only nine years after his death.

The outstanding personality of Karol, the great, however, glossed over the grave problems that his over-long pontificate still left to the Catholic Church and have affected his successors. For a certain number of Catholics, the pope's uncompromising leadership has polarized the Church and delayed the necessary reforms envisaged by Vatican II.

Situations have festered like the scandal of child abuse by the clergy in the old Churches of USA and Europe. Several members of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) flew from the States to Rome on the occasion of the funeral. Just as the group's members arrived at St. Peter's Basilica, led by founder Barbara Blaine, police officers escorted them outside the confines of St. Peter's Square. The problem will haunt the pontificate of Benedict XVI and still it is of these days the news that pope Francis publicly asked forgiveness for this sin.

The scandal of child abuse is compounded by the dramatic, terminal situation of the clergy in certain countries like Great Britain, and also all the other European churches. Christian communities need their pastors. What about the countries where the Catholic population is increasing like in Africa or the Philippines for that matter. Can one priest cope with a parish of 50.000, 100.000 faithful or even 150.000 like it is in Metro Manila?

The problem is on table table of pope Francis who seems to have revived the enthusiasm of the time of Vatican II with his view of a synodal church. The pastoral commitment with him has become missionary. The concerns of Liberation Theology that John Paul II didn't accept because of opposition to everything even faintly communist, are now present with pope Francis who has proclaimed blessed Archbishop Oscar Romero.

July 8, 2013: Pope Francis at Lampedusa

CHRIST AT LAMPEDUSA

The island of Lampedusa, where pope Francis decided to go to honor the immigrants who died at sea, is a symbol. The Holy Father's powerful reminder of God's words to Cain: "Where is your brother?" struck a chord in the heart of many. Yet, four years later, perceptions are changing about the phenomenon of the migrants which is assuming the proportions of a biblical Exodus.

On July 8, 2013, Pope Francis, in a surprising move, chose the tiny island of Lampedusa, which lies between Africa and Italy, as the target of his first trip as a pope, in order to meet the plight of the immigrants, he himself being the son of Italian immigrants to Argentina.

An estimated 8000 people entered Europe through Italy in the first six months of 2013. From 1994 to 2012, more than 6000 of them died at sea in the attempt. Even after the Pope's visit, hundreds of bodies were recovered from the cruel waters of the Mediterranean sea.

On arrival, pope Francis was taken out to sea in a Coast Guard boat, and he threw a wreath on the water in memory of those who had died in the passage. He embraced the refugees, some of whom had arrived that very day, then he delivered a homily directed not to the immediate hearers, but to the world.

The Pope said: "Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death: this tragedy has constantly come back to me like a painful thorn in my heart. So I felt that I had to come here today, to pray and to offer a sign of my closeness, but also to challenge our consciences lest this tragedy be repeated".

"God asks a question: 'Cain, where is your brother?' His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost the sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. The culture of comfort leads to the globalization of indifference".

"But I would like us to ask a third question: "Has any one of us wept for the death of these brothers and sisters? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!"

The Pontiff's visit made headlines around the world for bringing up the issue of immigration in a completely different light: from viewing immigration as a problem to understanding the plight of the immigrants. Moreover, the Pope pointed out to the Church the call to announce the Gospel to the outskirts of

the world. Lampedusa is really the outskirts of the world, a geographic marginal area but even more the margin where a fleeing humanity lands, escaping from misery, often among the indifference of the affluent Western world.

Disorderly, tumultuous, biblical

Four years have passed and the phenomenon of the migration to Europe from Africa has grown exponentially: the flow of people from many countries of Africa like Eritrea, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Ivory Coast, Senegal doesn't give signs of abating, on the contrary, the acceleration is impressive.

According to the statistics of the United Nations, from 2008 to 2013, the time of the visit of pope Francis to Lampedusa, about 300.000 migrants and refugees arrived in Europe. Slightly inferior is the number for 2014 alone. In 2015, they were more than 1 million, with a terrific acceleration. In 2016 they reached 500.000. In the first months of the present year the acceleration has further increased.

Almost daily we read this kind of report: "At least 970 migrants were rescued off the coast of Libya on Thursday, Italy's coast-guard said as the numbers attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe continued to rise. Even before Thursday arrivals, more than 13.400 people had arrived on Italy's shores so far this year- an increase of 35 percent compared with 2016 and 2015".

Most of them are the so called "economic" migrants, they do not necessarily come from a situation of destitution, they have means to pay the trip from their country to the shore of the Mediterranean and they give everything for the sea passage, the supreme gamble, ready to face the real risk of their life in the hands of the modern slave traders. They are convinced that if they manage to reach the shores of Italy they are in business.

A modern slave trade

The phenomenon has been compared to a modern slave-trade. Contrary to what the ancient slave-trade implied, this wave of migrants are not forced to their awful predicament, but are voluntary pursuers of the dream of easy life and wealth in Europe. It is a kind of hysteria provoked by the media which are widely available, especially to the young. This is why up to almost 50 percent of them are minors not accompanied by their parents.

The Italian have coined a new term for the criminals responsible for the sea passage, they call them “*scafisti*”: the masters of the hull (*scafo*) of the boats they stuff with human beings. Since they are exorbitantly paid already before their victims start the trip, they don’t give a damn if they survive or perish, they don’t feel the responsibility of delivering the “merchandise” in good condition.

They crowd the hull with people like sardines in a tin, at the risk of suffocation; they do not mind if the boat is overloaded and at the risk of capsizing. They already got their money! Given the utter chaos in the social and political life of Libya, these people enjoy total impunity.

The deaths at sea have increased exponentially: only during 2016, an estimate of 5000 lives were lost at sea. At the same time, the European nations have joined forces with the operation “Sophia” which was created in 2015 and brings together a fleet made up of ships belonging to different European countries in order to patrol the Mediterranean between Libya and Italy. The operation “Sophia” has rescued so far more than 33.000 people.

Diplomatic walls

The continuous, insistent call by pope Francis for a blank, unconditional acceptance is falling more and more on deaf ears. All over Europe the anti-migrants feeling is increasing and walls are going up here and there. Italy is in the frontline since it is on its shores that the migrants land in increasing number. The intention of most of them is to move on to Germany and the other countries of Northern Europe. But since many of these countries are now refusing their quota of migrants, the situation in the Italian gathering camps is already untenable.

Sometimes ago, admiral Enrico Credentino of operation “Sophia” stated that the solution was in Libya. This is the position the present Italian government has taken with the recent agreement with Libya, according to “The Migrants’ Protocol” of prime minister Gentiloni which was approved by all the heads of the European Community in their recent meeting at Malta (February 3 2017).

The agreement comprises investments to equip the Libyan government with the means of controlling or limiting the departure of the overcrowded boats, facilitating the repatriation of the “economic” migrants, moving the migrants

gathering camps to other African countries. The agreement has already been compared by Emma Bonino of the Italian Radical Party, to Donald Trump's wall with Mexico.

The same can be said of the previous agreement of the European Community with Turkey which stops the migrants and refugees mainly from Syria and the Middle East on their way to Northern Europe, especially Germany, along the so called Balcan route. So, in a way or another, the diplomatic walls try to diminish if not eliminate all together the flow of humanity aimed at the European paradise.

Boundaries

Is there a limit to the acceptance for a Christian or should the acceptance be boundless? History and common sense suggest that even in the Christian tradition, boundaries are recognized as essential and legitimate. Jesus himself invites the disciples to come away from the pressure of the crowds and go to a place for themselves to rest. After the Ascension, the community of the 120 apostles and disciples withdrew into the privacy of the upper room to pray and wait for Pentecost.

The monastic tradition contemplates the institution of the "Enclosure" which is strictly reserved for the members of the community: visitors, pilgrims, poor have their quarters but do not violate the accepted boundaries. I experienced the hospitality of the Missionaries of Charity in their community of Huruma in the slums of Nairobi: the perimeter walls allow an orderly life for the hundreds of school children who flock there every morning, as well as the hundreds of handicapped hosted there and the large number of novices in formation.

Outside, the pressure of slum life is evident in the overcrowding, promiscuity, dirt and the pervasive presence of *basura* (waste). You drive over rubbish and waste to reach the gate of the Missionaries of Charity, then inside there is cleanliness, order and dignified work. And this shows the importance of boundaries. What we allow to a religious community is even more essential for families and countries. A country without borders is not a real country.

This is what the European Community is experiencing: the need to regulate the influx of migrants for the sake of the present and the future, in a moment

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