

CAN WE REBUILD THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN A POST-PANDEMIC ERA?

INTRODUCTION

The world seemed to work like a well-oiled machine when, from China, Covid-19 spread to the whole world. The year 2019 came to an end full of economic and financial success in Europe and North America. The virus astonished everyone with the speed of its transmission, the globalisation of its impact and the worldwide inability to face its consequences. The whole world (or almost) stopped. We were invited (or even forced) to stay indoors. And in two months hundreds of thousands of people died, many more were infected and this economy that seemed unshakable...suffocated. Almost everything stopped, hospitals burst at the seams, most companies went into chaos and historic deficits were announced. The whole world realized that, after all, this 'normality' was very abnormal because it did not provide any security or constitute a reasonable defence against little attacks coming from microscopic beings like a simple virus. It has demonstrated that our economic systems do not even allow us to stop for two or three months!

Communication technologies have taken over the daily life of this world in panic. All our information – much of it false and demagogic – came through them. They also allowed people to communicate with each other, establishing the bonds that the virus has broken. The media informed and intoxicated, connected and broke, showed and hid. They allowed bridges to be built and ensured that believers of all faiths could 'celebrate' their faith in the context of 'spiritual fellowship'.

In the age of communication

This time of Covid-19 introduced many foreign expressions into our daily lives: 'lockdown', 'confinement', 'stay at home', 'tutto andrà bene', 'laudato si', 'fake news', 'smart working', 'home office', 'zoom', 'skype', 'webinar', 'live streaming', 'whatsApp', 'lay off'. ... and all the 'tele', from 'telework' to 'tele-school' (Ana Azevedo, spoke of the '*telecoisos*' which does not include '*tele Love*'!)... And it led to scientists, philosophers, theologians, journalists, writers, teachers, artists and musicians ... trying to fill our days of 'house arrest' by giving explanations, commenting, singing, animating and opening up paths to the future. Humour has also shown that it is one of the most serious things in the world: it was used to caricature dramas, ridicule certain negative situations and point out, with comical prospects, paths to victory over this pandemic. Cartoons, videos, different forms of entertainment, phrases, photos, and short texts filled the social networks and became 'viral', another expression used to say that half the world saw and reacted.

This Covid-19 worked as a filter, a sieve. A sort of 'decantation' happened during the periods of lockdown. These days following the furious passage of the virus force us to evaluate what is worthwhile continuing, what needs to change course and what urgently needs to be re-invented. In this age of hyper globalization, there are enormous weaknesses and many forms of interdependence. We are all caught in the same storm - Pope Francis repeated time and again that

we are all in the same boat - but some suffer more than others from the consequences of this pandemic. We have come to the conclusion that left all to ourselves we are not worth much and can do little. These critical times also help to put corrupt and dictatorial governments up against the wall, as their countries were not prepared to provide an adequate response.

How to be a Church today?

In the *Expresso*, Cardinal Tolentino wrote that *'the pandemic makes us aware of our limitations while at the same time forcing us to reflect on ways of inhabiting the world to which we can return'*ⁱⁱ. Above all, we must ask hard questions. We reached this crisis because *'we globalise the economy and communication, without paying attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the earth,' 'we get used to a utilitarian vision of reality,' 'we always want more, always more quickly, without accepting flaws. But, 'the pandemic restores our awareness of our limits' and places us at a 'crossroads of civilisation'.* And the Cardinal, who is a poet, recalls: *'normality is not a familiar place to turn to, but a building where we are called to be fully committed'.*

In the midst of all this, what does the Church have to say to the world? How do you explain these tragic events? What is the place of God and Spirituality in the context of a pandemic? The churches have closed their doors, but God and the faith of believers have been and will continue to be decisive at all times in history. Particularly in these times.

With the rapid globalisation of the pandemic, a world figure has emerged in the eyes of all: Pope Francis. His decisions and interventions have left their mark on the world in these times of profound pain and crisis. This is particularly true of his symbolic words and gestures, part of a long chain of papal interventions, especially "*Evangelium Gaudium*"ⁱⁱⁱ in 2013 (EG) and "*Laudato Si*"^{iv} in 2015 (LS), two documents that are more topical than ever, because of the proposals they make, but also because of the denunciations expressed loud and clear for all the world to hear.

The Catholic Church has always been at the forefront of the fight against the virus and its most dramatic effects (the speed of its spreading and the hunger and misery it has caused in the most fragile societies) and, of course, in the proclamation of the Gospel. The figure of the Pope has been central to this 'struggle', but dioceses, institutes of consecrated life, social institutions, movements, parishes... have played and are playing a decisive role in all that concerns responsible citizenship and the (re)construction of a just and fraternal world.

On May 19, 2020, those in charge of Seminaries and Family and Vocation Ministry in the Diocese of Coimbra presented to the Priests' Council a reflection during the turmoil of the pandemic. They admitted that they were living this moment as a time of stripping and detachment, forcing them to think and ask questions, such as: *'Are we going to make this a time of child-bearing or of burying, a time of hope or a time of fear, a time of opportunity or a time of lamentation, a time of dreaming of a new city or a time of hankering after the onions of Egypt?'*^v

This reflection of mine is different from all the others I have done to date. It was written in total confinement in my religious community in Rome. Therefore, I have had no access to libraries and bookstores other than ours and the texts I have worked on previously. I will make some adjustments in the near future based on the biblical foundations of the Christian faith, emphasising the proposals made by the Church through Pope Francis and others who, in recent times, have become an inspiration and a source of reflection, promoting solidarity and brotherhood.

Towards news horizons

Allow me to be a bit provocative, by linking two texts produced in this time of lockdown. They open up horizons for a post-Covid world with an uncertain future. I begin with Cardinal Tolentino Mendonça. On 18th April, in Rome, he suggested ten questions for the post-Covid period^{vi}. I summarise his ideas, putting only direct quotations in inverted commas: *'Has the process generated by the virus (...) led us to understand that we are in the same boat and that the only viable future lies in implementing other models of collective existence?'* Will it happen that *'when we reopen the borders we will move on to a new stage of globalisation?'* Addressing the burning issues of integral ecology, Cardinal Tolentino asks: *'will we stop considering the earth as an object to be exploited without limits? (...) Will we understand, at last, that everything is interconnected, as Pope Francis insisted in Laudato Si (LS 16)?'* Thinking about family, social and professional life post-covid, he asked: *'Will we find rhythms other than those of the dictatorship of a frenetic life (learning to slow down) and discover other tastes that nourish the soul as well (re-learning to cultivate our humanity)?'* And further on, he touches a nerve of the pre-covid situation: after all, who is more important for life on the planet? Is it those who make millions in financial speculation, in stock markets and business, in high-performance sport? The Cardinal's question leads us in another direction: *'Will we know how to take care of the doctors, nurses and carers who have had direct experience of this trauma?'* Finally - and, for me, this is the decisive question – *'Will a more holistic vision of life triumph, which understands the importance of values such as gift, gratuitousness and sharing, and enable us, for example, to achieve a more balanced synthesis between the individual and the community, between material life and spiritual life?'*

Confined to their homes for a few months, believers and religious 'leaders' felt asphyxiated and without the spiritual nourishment they received communally in their Church. From the city of Luanda, Aristides Neiva, one of the missionaries working in communities on the outskirts of the Angolan capital, quoted different biblical texts and concluded each time that it was important to get back onto our streets, because (addressing God): *"we were not made for exclusion but for joyful sharing; we are not made for the parking lot, but for the road; we are not made for isolation, but for service; we are not made for lying about, but for mission; we are not made for fear, but for adventure; we are not made for ourselves, but for You; we are not made for sleep, but for action; we are not made for the shore, but for the sea; we are not made for separation, but for embracing; we are not made to be shipwrecked but to cross oceans; we are not made for our death, but for Your Life^{vii}."*

This investigation was concluded on the day of Pentecost (31.05.2020), a solemnity that marked the return of believers to their temples for community celebrations.

1... YES, ALL OF YOU, 'INSPIRED' BY THE BIBLE AND THE SOCIAL TRADITION OF THE CHURCH...

The future is based on the values recorded in the pages of the Gospels. We can never ignore the parables of the Kingdom. For Christ, the essence of his message appears in the parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) and the Final Judgment (Mt 25:31-46). These two parables inspire the whole New Testament ideal which proposes attitudes corresponding to those of Jesus Christ: 'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 15:12). The practical proposal is expressed in the summary of the book of the Acts of the Apostles when it presents the ideal community, with one heart and one soul, putting everything into the common pool" (Acts 2:42 to 4:32).

The Social Doctrine of the Church has cemented these ideas and transformed them into projects in the different areas of human intervention. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church shows the essential areas of Church intervention, inspired by the Bible. In 2004, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (CPJP) published - in Italian - the 'Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church' (DSI), a reference work that presents the results of this Council launched by Pope Paul VI. The Portuguese edition appeared in 2005^{viii}. Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State of the Vatican, in his opening words, states: *'In the course of its history, and particularly in the last hundred years, the Church has never renounced - according to the expression of Pope Leo XIII - to say the 'word that is incumbent upon her' on questions of social life. (cf. Ibid., p.15). With this document, which brings together the main ideas of Christian social thought, the Church wishes '(...) to propose to all people a humanism equal to God's plan of love for history, an integral and supportive humanism, capable of animating a new social, economic and political order, founded on the dignity and freedom of every human person, to be brought about in peace, justice and solidarity. (Ibid., p.31).*

International cooperation for development is also decisive on a global scale. Countries scarred by poverty and underdevelopment need access to the international market. And other causes that contribute to the poverty of nations have already been identified: *'illiteracy, food insecurity, the absence of structures and services, the lack of measures to guarantee basic sanitation, the lack of drinking water, corruption, the precariousness of institutions and of political life itself. In many countries, there is a connection between poverty and the lack of freedom, of the possibility of economic initiative, of state administration capable of offering an adequate education and information system' (Ibid., p. 284).*

Maintaining the integrity of creation is a common responsibility of humanity. The authorities have to invest heavily and make courageous decisions to face health and environmental risks. Programming for economic development must also carefully consider the need to respect the integrity and rhythms of nature, since natural resources are limited and some are not renewable (cf. Ibid., pp.293-300). Safeguards have to be put in place in the use of biotechnology, which has to be carried out in the light of ethical (and not economic or political) criteria. Our times call for the sharing of the goods of creation (more distributive justice), more international solidarity and a rational and supportive management of water. We need to invest in new lifestyles, simpler, less consumerist. *The ecological question must not be addressed solely through the terrifying prospects of environmental degradation: it must be translated, above all, into a strong motivation for authentic solidarity on a universal scale' (Ibid., p.306)^{ix}.*

2... YES, BEING HAPPY MISSIONARY DISCIPLES (EG), IN FAMILY, WITH A SIMPLE LIFESTYLE...

'*Missionary Disciples*' is a telling expression that appeared in Brazil during the Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Aparecida in 2007. It's known that the Final Document was written by the Argentinean Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis.

Pope Francis, in the "Joy of the Gospel", launched seven appeals to the world and to the Church: *"Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of our missionary enthusiasm! (EG 80); 'Let us not be robbed of the joy of evangelization! (EG 83); 'Let us not allow people to rob us of hope!' (EG 86); 'Let us not be robbed of our community! (EG 92); 'Let us not be robbed of the Gospel! (EG 97); 'Let us not be robbed of the ideal of brotherly love!' (EG 101); 'Let us not be robbed of our missionary strength! (EG 109).*

D. António Couto, Bishop of Lamego, when reflecting on the *"Joy of the Gospel"* in a joint publication of all the newspapers and magazines of the MissionPress (missionary publications), quotes no. 120, which says that *"the Church of Christ is formed by "missionary disciples" and not by "disciples and missionaries", as if "missionary" could be only an ornament or an accessory to affix to the "disciple". It is not a more or less optional accessory, which one can have or not have, use or not use. It is by its very nature that the Church is missionary'* (Ad Gentes 2)^x.

Cardinal Tolentino Mendonça, in one of his chronicles in the *Expresso*, applauds Pope Francis' insistence that the Church should see itself as *"a Church that goes out to others , "a Church that announces the joy of the Gospel," "a Church that looks at the wounds of humanity," "a Church that is a field hospital," "a Church that is poor and open to the poor," "a Church that does not imprison the Spirit"*^{xi}.

Being a 'missionary disciple' requires inspiration and models^{xii}. In this respect, *Mary is the most perfect and Pope Francis, on the centenary of Fatima, was clear when he said that "whenever we look at Mary, we believe again in the revolutionary force of tenderness and affection'. And he said: "The Church only shines when she is missionary, welcoming, free, faithful, poor in means and rich in love!* ^{xiii}

After a long preparation, with much debating, the Synod on the Family, the Pope published *'Amoris Laetitia'*, where it is said that *'the family lives its own particular spirituality, being at the same time a domestic church and a living cell to transform the world'*^{xiv}. And, in his conclusion, the Pope launched a challenge: *'Families, let us go forward; let us continue walking! There is always something more we are promised. Let us not lose hope because of our limits, but let us never give up seeking the fullness of love and communion that we have been promised'*^{xv}.

In launching the Missionary Year 2018/2019, the Bishops of Portugal invited us to listen to and follow Pope Francis: *'With the 'missionary dream of reaching everyone', the Holy Father has encouraged us to go to the outskirts, to go to the poor, inviting young people to 'make a noise', not to 'sit on the couch' and watch life pass by. He invited the Church not to be introverted, afraid of taking risks, but to have the courage to be a living, welcoming Church for the excluded and outsiders. It is necessary to look at evangelization from Christ's point of view: as 'attraction' and 'sending', then 'contagion', accepting 'everyone, everything and always in Mission' (CEP 2018)*^{xvi}.

Pope Francis, in the wake of Vatican II which proclaimed the universal call to holiness, presents the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12) as the identity card of the Christian, in contrast to what usually happens in society^{xvii}. The Pope says: *'To be poor of heart: this is holiness' (GE 70); 'To react with humble meekness: this is holiness' (GE 74); 'To know how to weep with others: this is holiness' (GE 76); 'To hunger and thirst for justice: this is holiness' (GE 79); 'To look and act with mercy: This is holiness' (GE 82); 'To keep our hearts clean from all that stains love: this is holiness' (GE 86); 'To sow peace around us: this is holiness' (GE 89); 'To embrace the path of the Gospel every day, even if it brings us problems: this is holiness' (GE 94). Finally, the Pope sums it up like this: 'in chapter 25 of Matthew's Gospel (...) we find precisely a rule of behaviour on which we will be judged' (GE 95).*

It is necessary to invest in a simpler, more generous and fraternal style of life, which is less consumerist and predatory, as Pope Francis often says. In addressing 'Ecological Spirituality', he sums up what this conversion would like: *a 'return to simplicity that allows us to stop and savour the small things of life, to give thanks for the possibilities life offers, without clinging to what we have or being sad because of what we do not have(...). Sobriety, lived freely and consciously, is liberating'* (LS 222).

In his Message sent to the Pontifical Missionary Works, the Pope wants more confidence in the Holy Spirit, because *'He enkindles and maintains faith in people's hearts' and 'inflames and animates the*

Mission^{xviii}. He presents Mission with its 'most distinctive features': 'attraction; gratitude and gratuity; humility; facilitating, not complicating; being close to real life; the 'sensus fidei' of the people of God; the preference for the humble and poor'... these are the ideal criteria that the Pope proposes in line with what he wrote in 'Evangelium Gaudium'. To these values, the Pope adds, as warning signs, the 'traps to avoid': 'egocentricity; the desire to be in command; elitism; isolation from the people, abstraction and officialdom'. Then Pope Francis gives "advice for the journey": "to give answers to real questions and demands"; "to grasp the signs of God's action and then point them out to the whole world"; "there can be no bureaucrats or mission officials"; "look outside, do not look at yourselves in the mirror, break all the mirrors in the house"; "avoid a mentality of 'giving assistance', which, instead of offering instruments for missionary zeal, end up producing the phenomenon of parasitic cronyism in the Church itself"; the preference for the poor and little ones". The conclusion is short and sharp: 'Go with enthusiasm: there is so much to do on the road ahead of you'; 'have Mary's readiness - when she went to Elizabeth she did not do it out of self-interest'^{xix} .

Tomas Halik has published an online booklet^{xx} in several languages to reflect on how empty churches can be a sign and challenge from God. He insists on the idea of a Church as a campaign hospital. He says: 'Perhaps this time of empty church buildings will symbolically highlight the voids hidden in the churches and their possible future - if we do not make a serious attempt to show the world a completely different face of Christianity'^{xxi} .And he asks: 'where is today's Galilee, where can we find the living Christ?'^{xxii} Halik's final suggestion is to look for Christ among those who are seeking^{xxiii}; this would help us discover a new identity for Christianity today.

It is worth noting the Pope's contributions that Halik chose for his digital book, published on May 12 with the suggestive title: '*Life after the Pandemic*^{xxiv}'. It begins with the *urbi et orbi* blessing during the Extraordinary Prayer at a Time of Epidemic (in an empty St. Peter's Square, on 27thMarch): 'Why are you afraid?' and includes, among others, his speeches on Easter Sunday ('Like a new flame'), on Divine Mercy Sunday ('Selfishness is an even worse virus') and the interview given to the Spanish magazine 'Vida Nueva' ('A plan for rising again'). In all of these, the conviction was reaffirmed that we are all in the same boat together and together we will be saved or drown.

3... YES, WITH COMMITMENT, RISKING EVERYTHING FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS, TAKING ON THE PAINS OF TODAY'S WORLD

D. Tolentino Mendonça, in the retreat he gave to the Pope and the Roman Curia in 2018, quoted some UN reports, with figures that severely challenge the conscience of humanity: three out of ten people have no access to drinking water – what an assault on their dignity! This Bible scholar and poet reminded the Pope and the Cardinals that Jesus was a man on the periphery of society: 'He was not a Roman citizen - he did not belong to the first world of that time - nor was he part of the Jewish elite. It is true that he was born in Bethlehem, but on the outskirts, where the shepherds took their sheep, not in the town centre. And Nazareth, which gives him his name, was so insignificant that it is one of the few villages in Palestine that it is not named anywhere in the Old Testament (...). Galilee, however, became his favourite place for proclaiming the Kingdom. (...). Remember that Galilee was not only a land of crossroads, a place where you passed through, but also part of the periphery of Israel in Jesus' time; and Israel itself was an unimportant periphery of the empire, even if it was under Roman domination'. And he concludes: 'Jesus' message, therefore, is broadcast from this peripheral world!^{xxv} That is why, concludes the Portuguese Cardinal, that those who are astonished at Pope Francis for mobilizing Christianity to go towards the outskirts need only remember that Jesus was a man from the periphery of society and it is on the periphery that Christianity has an appointment with the future.

The option for the poor is decisive for the present and for the future of the Church. That is why the Pope - on June 13, 2017 (Solemnity of St. Anthony) - *launched the First World Day of the Poor (which would be celebrated on November 19). He says: "This Day is meant, above all, to stimulate believers to react against the wasteful, throw-away culture, and to create a culture of bringing people together". And he ends by saying: 'The poor are not a problem: they are a resource for embracing and living the essence of the Gospel'*^{xxvi}.

In his Christmas wishes to the Roman Curia on 21st December 2019, the Pope asked for renewal and communion. Speaking of the new Dicastery for Integral Development, he said that *'development takes place through the care of the immeasurable goods of justice, peace and the protection of creation. It is expressed concretely in the service of the most fragile and marginalized, in particular forced migrants, who, in our days, represent a cry in the desert of our humanity (...). The Church is called to give witness to the fact that, for God, no one is a 'foreigner', no one is 'excluded'*^{xxvii}.

The Bishops of Angola, in a pastoral note, reflected on the consequences of Covid-19 in people's lives and warned of tragedies such as poverty and hunger that have become worse, the increasing violence and the blatant social inequalities that this pandemic has increasingly exposed, demanding, in future, a special commitment from the authorities: *'The deficiencies that we see today in the health system, the lack of water for all and other problems should be among their priorities, in a kind of permanent 'state of emergency', although without social confinement'*^{xxviii}.

D. Manuel Vieira Pinto, the legendary Archbishop of Nampula, died on April 30, 2020. I quote from an article published by Anselmo Borges: *"Why do you, a bishop, when you come to speak to me, never speak of God and religion, but of the people, of the defence of their rights and their dignity?" asked President Samora Machel of Archbishop Manuel Vieira Pinto. "Because a god who needed my defence would be a god who is not God. God does not need to be defended. Man does,"* answered D. Manuel^{xxix}. He was recognized for his love of the very poor, to whom he dedicated himself as a missionary bishop in Mozambique. Knowing that freedom and democracy are major goods for human beings, he fought to the end for the defeat of colonialism and then for the freedom and democracy of the people. And in a context where missionaries were - by presidential order - confined to the cities, Bishop Manuel would be one of the fathers of a new type of pastoral planning in Mozambique, with the creation of a ministerial Church, based on the commitment of the laity in their communities.

The attacks on the dignity and human rights of people deserve a radical commitment from the Church. In 2009, the International Union of Superiors General in Rome created the *Talitha Kum Network* against human trafficking. This is one of the most flagrant violations of human rights and one of the greatest sources of profit on a planetary scale, along with arms and drug trafficking. Sister Gabriella Bottani, an Italian Comboni missionary, speaks of these modern slaves – as many as 40 million people: *'We have never had so many slaves in the world as today. Slavery affects, above all, groups of people in vulnerable situations who are exploited. This is the case of migrants and ethnic minorities, women and children: there is trafficking for sexual exploitation, trafficking for forced marriages, trafficking for slave labour and for servitude in the domestic context'*^{xxx}. And she adds: this pandemic has made the problem more dramatic and it is very difficult and risky to denounce such trafficking.

Institutions that were founded to serve the poor have opted to reach out to the peripheries. Here in Rome, the most striking example is that of the Community of Santo Egidio, founded in 1968 in a university setting by Andrea Riccardi. He writes: *'The regeneration of the Church and of Christian life starts precisely from the passion for the peripheries and for the marginalised, together with the rediscovery of the joy that is generated by living and communicating the Gospel in the periphery'*^{xxxi}. He works a lot with the homeless and other poor people and has been outstanding for his contribution to helping in the peace process of countries at war, as was the case in Mozambique.

These times of Covid-19 have generated more misery and isolation, further weakening those who were already on the peripheries and margins of society. Pope Francis recalled this in all his Easter sermons and talks, as he lived - in the words of Alfredo Teixeira - *'unprecedented moments'* Teixeira recalls: *"I remember the ceremonies presided over by the Pope, alone, in an empty St. Peter's Square (...). It was a kind of metamorphosis of the experience of solitude to an experience of communion (...) with a relationship of great intimacy with all those who are living a similar experience"*^{xxxii}.

There is a fundamental human right that these times of Covid-19 seriously violated in some places: the right of family and friends to say goodbye to their dead by mourning and celebrating the funeral. Sociologist Alfredo Teixeira recalls that *'funeral rites are among the most persistent rites in most societies'*. And, assessing the fact that funerals and wakes have been banned, he points the finger: *'I think it will certainly be one of the darkest areas of this experience'*^{xxxiii}.

Finally, a quick reference to the Pope's Message for the World Day of Peace 2020^{xxxiv}. Hope gives wings to move forward, even when the obstacles seem insurmountable. He refers to the drama of the many forms of established violence, fruit of the perversion of human relationships which destroys fraternity.

The Pope is convinced of the urgency of need for the conversion of the economy and of the human heart. We have to abandon economic systems that kill the weakest and create an ever deepening gap between rich and poor. It seems evident, then, that *'the culture of encounter between brothers and sisters breaks with the culture of using threats'*, making us - with the strength of the Holy Spirit - *'artisans of justice and peace'*.

There are two other key ideas that the Pope's message reinforces. Francis reminds us that *"the path of reconciliation requires patience and trust"*. And finally, we must give a special place to our faith: *'we must seek real brotherhood, based on having God as our common origin and living this in dialogue and mutual trust'*^{xxxv}.

4... YES, ALWAYS IN 'INTEGRAL ECOLOGY', COUNTING ON THE APPLICATION OF 'LAUDATO SI' AND 'DEAR AMAZON'.

It was five years ago when history was made in the Church^{xxxvi}. For the first time, a Pope published an encyclical on ecology. The reactions were immediate, such was the novelty of the subject and the frankness with which some subjects were treated. Some people have embraced it heart and soul, others are still 'heartburnt' because they disagree with its reflections and proposals for the future. A lot of ink has been spilled and, curiously, this document knocked down the walls of the Church, to the point where half the world commented on it, in political, economic, religious and academic contexts. *Laudato Si* has filled the media and been quoted in parliaments, presidential speeches, renowned works, conferences and cultural and social events....

Pope Francis places people at the epicentre of ecology. A true ecology - says *Laudato Si* - must begin with the most important: to love the poor, to integrate the excluded, to go out to the peripheries and margins, to care for the fragile. And, of course, for this mission to succeed, it is necessary to respect nature, with its rhythms, polluting neither the soil, nor the water, nor the air; recycling, reusing, planting trees, avoiding fires, treating dirty and residual waters and moving towards a 'green' economy in the deepest sense of the term. In short, *'there are not two crises, one environmental and one social: but one only, the complex socio-environmental crisis.'*^{xxxvii} This is what the Pope has

defended and continually repeats. The text of *Laudato Si* remains to be put into practice in its entirety, but it offers an enormous contribution for the construction of the future. The Pope's conviction is twofold: in God's Creation, everything is interconnected (LS 240); the Earth is our Common Home. In fact, without fraternity (God created us brothers and sisters) there is no ecology that can last and the earth will soon become uninhabitable.

To complete *Laudato Si*, the document '*Dear Amazon*'^{xxxviii} appeared before Covid-19 (02.02.20). It is the fruit of a synod, and has a long history, contained in the warnings to the whole world launched by *Laudato Si*. This document of Pope Francis is based on four great dreams: a social dream, a cultural dream, an ecological dream and an ecclesiastical dream. It says: '*The Lord, who first takes care of us, teaches us to take care of our brothers and sisters and of the environment which he gives us each day*' (QA 41). And it ends: '*As Christians, what unites us is the new commandment that Jesus left us unites us, the search for a civilization of love, a passion for the Kingdom that the Lord calls us to build with him. He unites us in the struggle for peace and justice. How can we not struggle together?*' (QA 109-110).

Today, *Laudate Si* is even more topical, as was shown by the '*Laudate Si Week*', proposed to celebrate the five years of this Social Encyclical from 16 to 24 May 2020: it is urgent to respect nature and love the poor. It is necessary to invest in the globalization of solidarity.

On World Earth Day (April 22nd), the TV stations opened and closed news bulletins with interesting reports showing the beauty that the planet has recovered, even if the balance of recent times was negative. The Pope said: '*Because of our selfishness, we have failed to take care of the earth*'^{xxxix}. The most optimistic said that the world was changing, that nothing would be as before and that ecological options would save the world after this Covid-19 experience. But there are powerful people in the world who, following their self-interested agenda, want to put the clock back to the polluting past which was destructive of mother nature and of many fragile human beings. They don't want to change as much as a comma in the practices that led the world to the edge of the abyss. And what is worse is that the deep economic crisis that Covid-19 generated will force them to back down on historic decisions like the one taken by the European Union in December 2019, which seemed an excellent Christmas gift: the European ecological pact. On that occasion, the President of the European Commission asked Europeans to change their lifestyle in order to better protect the environment, so that Europe would be the first continent to achieve carbon neutrality! Now, after the arrival of Covid-19, this objective has become more difficult to achieve!^{xl}

However, this virus has proved that we could live differently and we have reason to believe in a cleaner, greener, more fraternal future. To this end, the Pope created the 'Covid-19 Vatican Commission'^{xli} to help the Church and the world not to repeat the mistakes of the 2008 crisis, in order to spare the poor from being the worst hit.

Topics such as climate change or the green agenda can no longer be avoided at any international meeting, whether one is for or against. Fewer and fewer people are indifferent, given the urgency of these vital issues. We follow - it is true - UN summits and others that show how economic interests are more important than defending the rights of people to live in a healthy land. But already many decisions have been taken at the highest level to make the fossil age give way to renewable energies and to make the 'throw-away' and polluting culture give way to that of the recyclable and clean. With the almost total cessation of pollution sources, from factories to airplanes and cars, Covid-19 achieved in two months what some politicians and businessmen took years to understand: pollution decreases a lot when we are less aggressive, and respect for nature gives people a better quality of life. However, with the economic crisis and the urgent need for protection, Covid-19 brought plastic and throw-away items back (masks, gloves, protective suits, etc.). It also put pressure on governments to create or maintain jobs, involving support for all kinds of companies, even the most polluting, and putting the green agenda back in the drawer.

As it was the 'normal' that brought the world to this point, many voices are raised so that the post-Covid era does not allow a pure and hard return to that 'normal'. It is impressive how many scientists, politicians, sociologists, philosophers, journalists, theologians and economists are asking for the fulfilment of the European ecological pact, signed on December 11th, 2019, as well as demanding a greater understanding of the green agenda, in line with the proposals of *'Laudato Si'* and *'Dear Amazon'*, even when these documents are not specifically mentioned.

A major media event took place in France on 7th May 2020. The newspaper *'Le Monde'* gave prominence to the theme, with three pages on the 'Ten Principles for a New World' proposed by the Nicolas Hulot Foundation – Hulot, a militant ecologist, was a former minister of Macron^{xlii}. He brought together scientists, journalists, trade unionists, artists, managers, theologians, economists (one of them, the Jesuit Gael Giraud, whom I had the opportunity to hear at a conference he gave at the Gregorian University on these ecological themes). He was inspired by a phrase of Nelson Mandela, used in a speech in 1994: *'the time has come...'* The hundred principles of Nicolas Hulot all begin with this expression of the South African leader. These hundred proposals, some easier to implement than others, are all decisive. I quote the first: *'The time has come for us to lay together the first stones of a new world'* and the 69th: *'The time has come to learn to live more simply'*. In this same context, the joint appeal of 200 artists and scientists was published with the title: *'No return to normal!'* ^{xliii}The practices of consumerism, pollution, warming, the destruction of the planet and blatant social inequalities are challenged. These scientists and artists consider this radical transformation of our way of living in the future to be a courageous option, but they define it as a question of survival, dignity and coherence.

The pandemic is going away and cannot leave just a trail of death and shattered economies, waiting for fundamentalist populism to put everything back the way it was. Pedro Abrunhosa and Carolina Deslandes sang during the epidemic, proclaiming aloud the clear message that *'we are not alone in the storm'*. With over 100,000 views on YouTube (published on 6th May, 2020), speaking of the coming post-Covid times, they are asking for a holistic salvation because *'nobody wants only half of the future'*! And, unable to give physical hugs, the singers ask for *'hugs from within'*, confident that *'we will be together in the fair weather'*!

On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si*, the *'Laudato Si Week'* (May 16-24, with many videoconferences and publications) was celebrated. 42 Religious Institutions of various denominations announced their disinvestment in fossil fuels as opportunities for humanity. The former Primate of the Anglican Church, Rowan Williams, stated on that occasion that *'we must draw also lessons from this crisis of Covid for climate change'*. Tomas Insua, executive director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, also argued that every dollar invested in fossil fuels is a vote for suffering.

Pope Francis, at the 'Regina Coeli' of the Ascension (the first event with people in St. Peter's Square since its closure), marked the fifth anniversary of his ecological and social encyclical, launching a special year to *'call attention to the cry of the earth and of the poor'*^{xliv}.

In evaluating these five years of *Laudato Si*, Luisa Franco referred to the five changes that the encyclical has brought about: the creation of the new Roman Dicastery for integral development; the proclamation of 'ecological sin'; the union of the Christian Churches for the care of creation; the dialogue with the whole world through the Synod on the Amazon and the initiative 'the Economy of Francis'; and the youth movements for the care of our common home^{xlv}.

Returning to *'Laudato Si'*: Pope Francis says that politics cannot be subject to economic interests. We must accept to consume less and dare to change the global development model. *'It is simply a matter of redefining progress. A technological and economic development that does not leave a*

better world and an integrally superior quality of life cannot be considered progress' (LS 194). All this is because 'social love is the key to authentic development' (LS 231).

5... YES, INSPIRED BY YOUNG PEOPLE WITH VISIONS AND OLDER PEOPLE WITH DREAMS

'We all own it'. The expression is sportive and was launched, in the form of a challenge, to the many thousands of young people who participated in the World Youth Days in Krakow. Pope Francis told them that they could not spend their lives sitting on a sofa or on the seats watching or on the benches as reserves. No! Young people always go to the game and are players! He said: 'Dear young people, we did not come into the world to 'vegetate', to spend our days comfortably, to turn life into a couch that puts us to sleep; on the contrary, we came for another purpose, to leave a mark. It is very sad to go through life without leaving a mark. To follow Jesus, it is necessary to have a good dose of courage, to decide to exchange the sofa for a pair of shoes that will help you to walk on roads never dreamed of and not even thought of, roads that can open up new horizons, where you can be infected with joy, the joy that is born from the love of God, the joy that is impressed in your heart by every gesture and every attitude of mercy. The times that we are living in today do not need young people on sofas, but young people with shoes, even better, with football-boots. What our times need are players on the pitch, there's no room for reserves. The world today is asking you to be the protagonists of history, because life is beautiful as long as we want to live it, as long as we want to leave a mark. Jesus invites you, he calls you to leave your mark on life'^{xlvi}.

The Pope called a Synod on youth, faith and vocational discernment and promoted a pre-synod meeting (Rome, 19-24th March 2018) with about three hundred young people from five continents, as well as fifteen thousand other young people through social networks. Rui Teixeira, a young Portuguese man who, in an article published by the entire MissionPress^{xlvii}, shared his impressions of the event, recalling that it was the first time in the history of the Church that a Pope called a pre-Synod. He highlighted the solemn opening session with the Pope presiding. *'300 young people met face to face with the Pope. They asked for a frank reflection on the realities and issues that concern young people and an unfiltered dialogue with the hierarchy.'*^{xlviii}

The Final Document of the Synod (DFS), held from October 3rd to 28th, 2018^{xlix}, is structured on the basis of the text of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). The first part presents the joys, the dramas and the challenges facing young people (DFS 6-57). In the second part, it is intended that the compassion that Jesus had for the most fragile should be lived out by young people today (FDH 58 -113). The last part refers to the urgency of the mission where the major questions are present: solidarity, justice, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, social doctrine of the Church, ecology, peace, digital environment, volunteering, migrants, solidarity... (FDH 114 -164)

The Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation that Pope Francis published with the suggestive title *'Christ lives! (CV)'* is the finishing-line of a long journey, but it is meant to be a starting point towards the future of the Church and the Mission. *'Christ lives, He wants you alive!'* is the Pope's initial cry (CV 1). The Pope recalls that Christ exercised his Mission as a young man and died at only thirty-three years of age. Mary was invited by God to be the Mother of Jesus in her youth. The Bible and the History of the Church are full of other young people who have left their mark and continue to be a reference and inspiration for the new generations today (Cf. Cv 14-29).

The challenge of Mission is constant: a young Church needs young people who are committed, willing to give their lives for the causes they embrace, for the projects in which they believe. They

can and must have an ever greater voice in the Church so that it does not grow old, crystallize and imprison the Spirit, source of creativity and transformation^{li}.

The digital environment has taken over the contemporary world. The internet and social networks are the 'public square' where the new generations meet and take shape. That's where commitments to responsible citizenship are generated; but at the same time they are places of loneliness, of lies (fake news), of violence (cyber-bullying), of exploitation and of addictions (Cf. CV 86-90).

Pope Francis asks that migrants (many of them young people) should be seen as an opportunity and not a threat, since their stories speak of an encounter between peoples and cultures (Cf. VC 91-94).

Young people cannot remain on the balcony looking at life passing by on the road. They cannot sit on the sofa. They cannot be like parked cars. They must take risks, go out, play, hit the road, dare, live! (Cf. CV 143). Always connected with Christ and energised by the wind of His Spirit.

The Pope's main call is to commit oneself to solidarity with the poorest, those who live on the outskirts and on the margins (Cf. CV 74-78 and 170-174). The invitation is to be committed to Mission - a courageous project that already inspires many young people today (Cf. Cv. 175-178 and 239-241).

The chapter '*Youth with roots*' speaks of the importance of commitment in life and mission and of deepening it among young and old people (Cf. Cv. 179-201).

There is also a request from the Pope to open up new and wider horizons that will lead to dialogue with other Christians and different religions, and with people who claim to be non-believers (Cf. Cv. 235).

And to conclude... a wish: 'May the Holy Spirit empower you in this 'race' forward. The Church needs your impetus, your intuitions and your faith. We need you!'. (CV 299).

Lisbon will host the World Youth Days (WYD) in 2023. The symbols of WYD should have been distributed by the Pope on Palm Sunday in Rome. Covid-19 postponed this ceremony till the feast of Christ the King. Cardinal Tolentino Mendonça was due to give a conference to the hundreds of Portuguese youth who were to come to Rome. He has sent it by internet. He dealt with the theme planned for 2020: '*Young man, I tell you, rise up!*' (Lk 7:14). He began by recalling that 'to rise up' is linked to 'resurrection'. Cardinal Tolentino spoke of the "style of Jesus," attentive to and moved by what is happening in others' lives, breaking with the 'dictatorship of indifference'. He then presented the four actions described in the text: '*he drew close*', '*touched*', said '*Young man, I tell you*', and continued to speak: '*let yourself be raised up!*' Life is only positive if we are willing to serve others, even if we have to risk our lives. It is necessary to say yes to love, as the Pope asked, without "ifs" or "buts," just as Jesus did for us, because our heart cannot remain a prisoner of lockdown^{lii}.

Joel's prophecy about the visions of the young and the dreams of the old (Joel 3:1) point to the urgency of combining the wisdom of age with the vitality and boldness of youth. Cardinal Tolentino, in the midst of a pandemic, called for the reconciliation of European societies with old age, which we often equate with a burden for society, whereas older people are an enormous store of wisdom, love and generosity in families and in certain institutions. And he gives the world a warning: '*if old people are reduced to numbers, and to numbers with little human and social relevance, we could easily overcome the health crisis, but we would be diminished as a community*^{liii}.

In defence of the elderly, the Community of Santo Egidio came out with a World Appeal published on 23rd May: '*Without the elderly there is no future. We appeal to all to re-humanize our societies.*

We say NO to selective health care^{iv}. This kind of 'Public Petition' was launched as a warning because the elderly of Europe are threatened by the throw-away culture. It states: *It is not possible to let the generation that fought against dictatorship, worked for reconstruction after the war and built Europe to die.* This text, published in several languages, is signed by Andrea Riccardi (founder of the Community), Romano Prodi, Manuel Castells, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, Jurgen Habermas, Luís Miguel Cintra and Alice Vieira, among many others.

6... YES, WAGERING ON ECUMENICAL, INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTER CULTURAL DIALOGUE AS THE HORIZON

Dialogue has become decisive for the present and future of humanity. Believers, especially a good part of their leaders, have already become aware of its urgency. Catholics live this dialogue on different fronts: with their Christian brothers and sisters (ecumenical), with believers of other religions (Inter Religious) and with people who say they do not profess any creed (Inter Cultural).

With regard to the ecumenical dialogue, we have already come a long way. And much is written about this journey made in common by Christians of different confessions. Still in its beginnings, and therefore more urgent, is the Inter Religious and the Inter Cultural dialogue.

In December 2018, I went to Zanzibar, a Tanzanian island with a long and sad history of the slave trade. It is 99% Muslim, but the small Christian and Hindu communities are respected. The Catholic bishop, Monsignor Augustine Shao, is a Holy Spirit Missionary (Spiritans) and that is why the Spiritans Forum on Interreligious Dialogue^{lv} was organized there from December 3rd to 9th. At the time, I wrote: *'What do they have in common, a Spiritans working in a war-torn country like the Central African Republic and another who is in Molenbeek, a social and cultural 'periphery' in Brussels, unfortunately famous for being the 'nest' of terrorism in Europe?' And a Spiritans who works in Pakistan and another who lives in northern Cameroon? And one who is in Mauritania and another who works in India? One who works in the north of the Congo and another who is in the Philippines? The answer is simple: these and many other Spiritans work in contexts where Inter-religious dialogue is absolutely fundamental to their Mission*^{lvi}.

Twenty-six Spiritans, from five continents, shared, reflected, prayed and tried to open up new paths for the future of missions in the 21st Century. The Final Message is full of joy, wake-up calls, positive sharing and hopes; but also serious worries. Joy and hope because more and more people are working in Inter-religious contexts and a long road has already been travelled. Anguish and fear because persecution is increasing; wars and violence, invoking the name of God, are becoming more frequent; the closure of some countries to missionaries is a reality ... But there is no alternative to this path that we have to go down, even if in many places it seems that only Christians are open to dialogue.

Shortly after Zanzibar, Abu Dhabi reinforced the conviction of the Church about the decisive importance of Inter-religious Dialogue. Pope Francis received the invitation to the Conference on Human Fraternity, made by Sheik Amad Al Tayyeb for 4th February, 2019. In his conference he stressed the values of peace, justice, tolerance, open education and building bridges instead of walls. He called for freedom and recognition for foreign religious minorities. And at the end he signed the Abu Dhabi Declaration where these values are written. It was very interesting to see Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish leaders sitting at the same table.

800 years ago, Francis of Assisi went to meet the Sultan of Egypt. Eight centuries later, the affirmation was repeated that religions must work together in their efforts to guarantee peace and freedom; the shared and stated conviction that religions must help societies mature in their capacity for reconciliation, in their vision of hope and in following concrete paths of peace.

Also in February, the Pope visited Morocco – once again with the conviction that prayer and dialogue must defeat war, armaments, walls and the misery of peoples. What's more, only respect and tolerance can open the way to spiritual maturity that benefits the whole of society. From human brotherhood and faith it is possible to build a world with more justice, peace and respect for the rights of people. Zanzibar and Abu Dhabi are only geographical names, but the meetings that took place there will leave their mark on the future of humanity. We can also add to these visits, those that the Pope recently made to Japan and Thailand.

Inter-Cultural Dialogue is very much present in the Pope's acceptance of giving interviews to people from the world of culture who claim to be agnostic. I just mention the case of Dominique Wolton, a world-renowned French sociologist who is director of research at the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique*, the largest scientific research institution in France and one of the most important in the world. The book *'A Future of Faith'* discusses and shares the major issues that are current, from capitalism to the family, from minorities and refugees to social inequalities, from religious fundamentalism to the reforms underway in the Roman Curia. There is an affirmed conviction that dialogue opens the door to a more inclusive future^{lvii}.

Within the world of today's agnosticism, Yuval Noah Harari's name has a special place. He is a best-selling author, a Jew living in Jerusalem, who has written three books that have been translated into many languages in recent years: *'Homo Deus'*, *'Sapiens'* and *'21 Lessons for the 21st Century'*. This last work, published in 2018^{lviii}, cites the Good Samaritan (p.83) and states that *'Pope Francis leads the fight against global warming in the name of Christ (as seen in his encyclical Laudato Si)'* (p.161). He recognizes that *'by uniting people, religious beliefs enable human cooperation on a large scale'* (p.272). And he amazed me when he wrote: *'(...) a strong belief in a compassionate God who commands us to turn the other cheek can help contain anger. That was the enormous contribution of religious faith to peace and harmony in the world'* (p.234).

In the context of a pandemic, the newspaper *'Le Monde'* invited Harari to reflect on the moment the world was going through and he wrote that, in addition to being victims of the consequences of the coronavirus, people suffer from distrust of each other^{lix}. And he shared the conviction that by looking at how the world has fought the pandemics of the last century, it will only be through international solidarity that the impact of Covid-19 will be resolved.

The 14th May 2020 will go down in history as a Day when Muslims, Christians and believers of other faiths came together for a day of Prayer, Fasting and Charity against Covid-19. António Guterres, UN Secretary General, joined in. This day was a great milestone for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue (cf. www.ecclesia.pt, 14.05.2020).

7... YES, WITH OPEN QUESTIONS AND GOOD NEWS, ATTACKING FAKE NEWS

The Second Vatican Council asked for it (in *'Inter Mirifica'*, 1963) and Pope Paul VI established it in 1967: the first World Communications Day. Since then, the Pope has always written a strong and challenging message for this Day, showing the strengths and weaknesses of the use of the media. Mission is written about, demonstrated, 'posed', shared... but, above all, it is lived and witnessed to

with conviction. Those who have short horizons and do not cultivate memory cannot have deep convictions or an open mentality.

Paulus Editora, in 2016, published the 50 Messages that the Popes had written for this Day. I made a study of them in an article published in *'Church and Mission'*^x. I observed, in my investigation, that the media have evolved a lot during this half century. They have come to stay, to forge a new culture and to pose enormous challenges to the Church which, for better or worse, is also using them in its mission of proclaiming the values recorded in the pages of the Gospels. And it is always good to remember that the word 'Gospel' was taken from the Greek dictionary and means 'Good News'!

Relations between the Church and the media throughout history have not been easy or peaceful. The news always frightens and raises waves of suspicion. Moreover, the bad news (which gets a bigger audience, as a general rule, than the good news!) easily collides with the 'Good News' which is the 'Gospel'.

In his Message for 2020 (www.vatican.va), Pope Francis pointed out basic values: wisdom, courage, patience and discernment. He invited people to look at reality with the glasses of truth and love.

Communication technologies are powerful, but they are neither innocent nor innocuous. They generate a new culture. They convey content and provide services. They share what is happening in the world, allow interconnectivity and mobilize for solidarity. But they also mislead, invite and lead to criminal practices. A lot of human trafficking is facilitated by them. Pornography is given a free hand to spread. There are hackers who get into bank accounts or get private documents in order to blackmail, extort money or destroy the lives of people and institutions ... We have to become part of this 'media culture' to know how to navigate in it.

And we are worse off when – by the deliberate choices of people and organisations - news is invented to achieve certain goals. I give some examples: the *'Público'* newspaper, on 6th May 2020, reported that more than 2,700 false news stories had already been broadcast about Covid-19'. We can't go along with 'fake news', this false and evil news that can cause havoc. In many publications, the level of falsehood is sophisticated and deep ('deep fake'). As Christians, we will always cross-check the truths recorded in the pages of the Gospels with the results of science which is the fruit of the talents that God distributes to humans for them to be productive.

In this age of the Internet, with its cutting-edge technologies, all kinds of applications and social networks that carry us all over the world in seconds, we must keep our eyes open to discern what brings hearts together and what destroys both relationships and lives. We must generate more social justice, because the world is beginning to divide into two categories: the information-rich and the information-poor, that is, between those who access communication technologies and those who are excluded from them. Dominique Wolton, trying to characterize our days, says that the key word of our time is *'connected'*. And she asks, somewhat cynically, *'will disconnection be the word that symbolizes the 21st century?'*^{lxi} For Wolton, a specialist in communication issues, it is important to be alert to the addictions that technologies cause, along with the addiction to machines and programs that do not let us disconnect. Social networks, chats and games can cut us off from life and the world.

Thanks to Pope Francis, a Jesuit-Journalist-teacher who, years ago, launched the chair of Cyber-theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, came to the fore: he is Fr. António Spadaro, who became better known when he made history by publishing an interview which the Pope gave to the press. Cyber-theology aims to foster reflection on Christianity in the internet age^{lxii}. Cardinal Tolentino Mendonça, coordinator of the collection that edited the Portuguese version of this short manual, recalls that in the age of the internet the biggest problem is the decoding of the message. The question is: *'what are we being told?'* He explains: *'Day by day, a major problem is coming to*

the fore: the crisis of interpretation. That is, the lack of shared knowledge about what is essential; what unites us; and what can serve as a foundation - for each individual and for all together as a community - for the different possible ways of reinventing ourselves^{!xiii}.

This period of social distancing has shown the Church that the media are an open door to the world. And we need to know them, to know how to use them, to understand their enormous potentialities and benefits. But it is also fundamental to gain enough wisdom to guard against their possible harm. We multiply television and internet transmissions, we make available texts, prayers, songs and reflections on digital platforms. But we have also circulated a lot of 'garbage' and 'fake news' in religious clothing that have deceived many unsuspecting people. As the Braga Priests' Council said during the pandemic: *'We know well that it's not just a matter of transferring 'what we've always done' to the new means that the technical possibilities offer us. But we must know how to inhabit both the 'digital continent' and all the human and existential contexts that require languages and training that we need to perfect^{!xiv}.*

We have a moral obligation to ward off all the fundamentalisms that blur our vision and make us short-sighted and aggressive.

We must accept humour as one of the fundamental attitudes in the fight for truth and against depression in times of tragedy. I will give just one example: during the lockdown, a cartoon with a believer talking about his way of living in a time of Covid-19 was circulated on social networks. It begins: *'I don't need a mask, a gel... God will protect me! Then he shouts to the four winds: 'Oh my God. I trust in you, Lord! Protect me!' Later, by now lying on a hospital bed, he complains to the Most High: 'Oh God! I trusted you! But you did not protect me!' And God, from above, answers: 'Son, I gave you a mask, disinfectant soap and gel and directed you to social isolation; I asked you to stay at home and thus keep yourself safe... But you did not listen to me!^{!xv}*

Tomorrow, as today, the important and decisive thing will continue to be the proclamation of the Joyful Good News. That will give hope and open up new paths to the future.

CONCLUSION

Poets are always lights in times of darkness. It is not by chance that Cardinal Tolentino Mendonça has become, in these times, one of the most quoted authors. And we can go back a bit in our history and find Fernando Pessoa who wrote: *'After all. 'Of everything three things remained: the certainty that we are always starting...the certainty that we must continue...the certainty that we can be interrupted before finishing. So we must: make of an interruption, a new path... of a fall, a dance step... of fear, a ladder... of a dream, a bridge... ..of a search, a meeting.'*

Pope Francis has been the great world figure in this period of the fight against Covid-19. The pandemic, like many dramas afflicting the world today, does not seem to have taken the Pope by surprise, for what he has written and done is a warning of the problems the world creates or - as in this case - of the difficulty of responding to critical moments of pandemics. Mia Couto said it well when he wrote that *'pandemics take us prisoner without a prison and create a nation composed of guilt and fear.'^{!xvi}*

I have quoted many documents and talks of the Pope, because they contain the seeds of solutions to the world's problems, based on the plan of happiness that God traces out for humanity. If we live according to these values, we will forestall the irruption of many tragedies and, above all, the world

will live in solidarity and will be prepared to combat the wretched situations that arise. Our great 'weapon' is fraternity, something that results from our common fatherhood/motherhood, because we are all brothers and sisters, being children of God. And there are rights that are ours. At the Easter Vigil, the Pope cried out to the world: *'Tonight, we have won a fundamental right that will not be taken away from us: the right to hope. It is a new, living hope that comes from God.'*^{lxxvii} In the same celebration, the Pope indicated post-Covid paths: *'Let us silence the cries of death: of war, we have had enough! Stop the production and trade of weapons, because it is bread that we need, not machine guns. Stop the abortions, which kill innocent lives. Open the hearts of those who have plenty, to fill the empty hands of those who do not have basic necessities'*^{lxxviii}. In the Easter blessing *Urbi et Orbe*, the Pope came back to the same theme: *'Truly, words like indifference, selfishness, division, and forgetfulness are not what we want to hear at this time. What's more, we want to banish them from all times!'*^{lxxix}

In pastoral terms, these times call for conversion and change of practice. Following the suggestions of Thomas Halik, we have to dialogue with all the people who are looking for a way forward, we who are also looking for new ways to intervene in history according to God's plans. And we need to continue to reflect on what these 'empty churches' of this period of emergency mean, expanding the limits of our understanding of the Church^{lxx}. The Church of the present and the near future should not be *'markedly clerical, but markedly lay: lay people form the vast majority of God's people.'*^{lxxi} Fr. Jerónimo Lubongo, in Huambo, proposes a Church that has more competence in the area of health services, becoming part of the teams that make decisions and coordinate responses in times of pandemics - for example, in the area of the production and use of medicines and vaccines. Nuno Santos, from Coimbra, in the online project called *"zaragatoa, a Church after the pandemic,"* insists on the *"need for a 'thirsty Church' and one that 'questions': 'the Church of the future will be a Church forging ahead, as yet without all the solutions, not yet complete, not self-sufficient and always needing to seek out the Source'*^{lxxii}. The Church must be more ministerial, with hierarchy and laity sharing decisions, as happened in Mozambique during the period when there was no religious freedom.

The family must regain pastoral leadership. During the state of emergency, Alfredo Teixeira pointed out *'that some families did things they had never done at home, a kind of liturgy adapted to the home (...). This is an image that is part of the very 'genesis' of Christianity itself, in its DNA'*. And he concluded: *'It is probable that in some Catholic contexts one can truly speak of a rediscovery: the possibility of the family as such being the protagonist of religious experience.'*^{lxxiii} With respect to the present moment, José Vieira, President of CIRP (Conference of Religious Institutes of Portugal), asks for moderation, drawing attention to three Gospel images: *'too much salt does harm, too much light burns, too much leaven spoils the dough.'* He alerts us to the concept of the domestic Church that has been around for some time: *'Vatican II recovered the theology of the domestic Church. On the other hand, the basic ecclesial communities (Latin America) and the small Christian communities (Africa) are steps to bring the Christian community back to the essentials.'*^{lxxiv}

It is also important to give a voice to young people and bring them on board, and to treat the elderly and those weakened by the disease with special tenderness.

The Church must continue to fight against an economy that kills and help to build a new model of development that is more inclusive, ecological and fraternal. Gael Giraud, a Jesuit economist, warns that today it is not goods/commodities that yield but capital (and the financial market controls commodities). It is urgent to insist on the Church as a campaign hospital, as Cardinal Antonio Marto argued: *'a merciful, Samaritan Church, close to the wounded people, because we live more and more in a world of wounded people, very wounded (...)* a Church that goes out to the people, to the different peripheries'^{lxxv}. Anselmo Borges asks the provocative question: *'when the hecatomb is over, will we at least have learned how to discover what is essential? Or will we return to the whirlwind of possessing, forgetting how to be?'*^{lxxvi}. It seems important to me to follow the Priests'

Council of Braga that wants to continue *'translating the Gospel into gestures of consolation, healing, forgiveness and sharing of goods (...) sharing what we have and are, caring for all (...), challenged to go out and meet people in the reality of their lives in peripheral areas, finding a new way of being with them (...), of being Good Samaritans in a world of indifference where everyone is in a hurry.'*^{lxxvii} We must support and accompany the work of the Vatican Commission "Covid19" so that the errors of the old crises are not repeated and the poor continue to be the ones who suffer most.

Issues related to communication technologies require further reflection for more daring decisions. But it is clear that the Church needs to become more at home in the digital environment, something which will require proper skills and adequate training. It cannot reduce its media intervention to broadcasts of religious events. It must go further and deeper. Having said that, something has been learned: travel and logistical expenses can be avoided, with greater investment, whenever desirable, in videoconferences. And the use of various apps will allow more sharing and discussion on major topics.

Integral ecology must be taken even more seriously in this *Laudate Si* Year. The Programming Team of the Coimbra Seminar, the SDPF (Diocesan Secretariat of the Family) of and the SDPV (Diocesan Secretariat of Vocations) and Pre-Seminary propose *'to get to grips with ecology as a central theme of the Faith, because we need another model of sustainable development that does not dispense with a perspective of holistic ecology'*^{lxxviii}. It is essential to abandon fossil fuels and other disposable and polluting sources of energy, and opt for clean and renewable ones. We must value common property more than private property. We must invest more in teleworking, in spending our holidays closer to home, in the use of public transport and in the consumption of local products. We must have an increasingly simple, sober and fraternal lifestyle.

Rather than presenting concrete proposals I am being provocative. I have tried to open up possible avenues rather than to set targets. I raise more issues than I provide solutions. In short, the world will only advance if the globalization of injustice, indifference and the destruction of the planet give rise to the globalization of solidarity, fraternity and integral ecology.

Tony Neves CSSp, Coordinator of 'Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation' (JPIC) and 'Interreligious Dialogue, in Generalate' (IRD) - Roma

Translation: Fr. James Flynn, CSSp, in Lisbon.

FOOTNOTES

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ⁱⁱ José Tolentino MENDONÇA, Que coisa são as nuvens, in 'Revista E (EXPRESSO)', 10.05.2020, p.169.

ⁱⁱⁱ PAPA FRANCISCO, Evangelium Gaudium, 2013.

^{iv} PAPA FRANCISCO, Laudato Si, 2015

^v Reflexão da Equipa de Programação do Seminário, do SDPF e do SDPV e do Pré-Seminário apresentado ao Conselho Presbiteral de Coimbra, 19 de maio de 2020, nº1

^{vi} José Tolentino MENDONÇA, 10 perguntas para o pós-covid 19, in Revista E (Expresso), 18.04.2020, p.86.

- vii Aristides NEIVA, Também nós, amarrados como jumentinhos. In *Ação Missionária*, maio 2020, p.12.
- viii CONSELHO PONTIFÍCIO JUSTIÇA E PAZ, *Compêndio da Doutrina Social da Igreja*, Ed. Principia, Cascais, 2005.
- ix Cf. Tony NEVES, *Angola, Justiça e Paz nas intervenções da Igreja Católica (1989-2002)*, Ed. Texto Leya, Cascais 2012, pp. 121-157. These investigations on the Social Teaching of the Church were published in this thesis for a doctorate in Political Science.
- x D. António COUTO, O Amor verdadeiro está lá sempre primeiro, in 'AÇÃO MISSIONÁRIA', janeiro 2014, p.4.
- xi Cf. José Tolentino MENDONÇA, Igreja, hospital de campanha, in 'Revista E (EXPRESSO)', 10.03.2018, p.92.
- xii Cf. Luis Rafael AZEVEDO, *Discípulos Missionários do Deus desconhecido*, Ed. LIAM, Lisboa, 2019.
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- xviii Papa FRANCISCO, Mensagem às Obras Missionárias Pontifícias, in 'www.vatican.va', 21.05.2020.
- xix IBIDEM.
- xx Cf. Tomas HALIK, *O sinal das Igrejas vazias. Para um cristianismo que volta a partir*. Ed. Paulinas, abril 2020.
- xxi IBIDEM, p.9.
- xxii IBIDEM, p.12.
- xxiii Cf. IBIDEM, p.13.
- xxiv Cf. Papa FRANCESCO, *La vita dopo la pandemia*, Libreria Editrice vaticana, 12.05.2020.
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- xxvi Papa FRANCISCO, Mensagem para o I Dia Mundial dos Pobres, in 'www.vatican.va', 13.06.2017.
- xxvii Papa FRANCISCO, *Discurso à Cúria Romana*, in 'www.vatican.va', 21.12.2019.
- xxviii Conferência Episcopal de Angola e S. Tomé (CEAST), Nota Pastoral em tempo de covid 19, Luanda, 22.05.2020, nº
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- xxix Anselmo BORGES, D. Manuel Vieira Pinto, *Ética e Mística*, in 'www.dn.pt', 01.05.2020; ler ainda Bento DOMINGUES, *A minha dívida com D. Manuel Vieira Pinto*, in 'www.publico.pt', 10.05.2020.
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- xxxi Andrea RICCARDI, *Periferias. Crise e novidade para a Igreja*, Ed. Sant'Egidio / Lucerna, 2019, p.116.
- xxxii Alfredo TEIXEIRA, *As pessoas estão a descobrir que se podem relacionar e vincular de formas diferentes*, in 'www.rr.sapo.pt' e 'www.ecclesia.pt', 08.05.2020.
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- xxxiv Cf. Papa FRANCISCO, Mensagem para o Dia Mundial da Paz de 2020, in 'www.vatican.va', 08.12.2019.
- xxxv Ibidem.
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- xxxvii Reflexão da Equipa de Programação do Seminário, do SDPF e do SDPV e do Pré-Seminário apresentado ao Conselho Presbiteral de Coimbra, 19 de maio de 2020, nº11.
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