

Turning the Church's Narrative on its Head

The 'secret wound'

Piero Coda

The author, formerly secretary of the Pontifical Theological Academy and current member of the International Theological Commission, focuses here on the work of Blessed Antonio Rosmini in today's modern context. In considering five wounds evident in today's Church, he speaks of transfiguration and new life seen through the Resurrection of Jesus as capable of bringing about both a new proclamation of the Gospel and an evangelical witness in the Church. Additional perspectives from other Churches follow this article.

The Church - Gospel

Pope Francis has said 'The Church is the Gospel'. This is also seen in his choice of the name 'Francis' which unequivocally emphasizes the kind of radical, faithful witness to the Gospel that lies at the heart of Francis' centuries-old message and one still needed today more than ever before. (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 271).

To say 'the Church is the Gospel' follows from the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, which does not mean triumphantly saying the Gospel is the exclusive possession of the Church, rather, it signifies that the full measure of the Church's faithfulness to Jesus Christ lies only in the Gospel. The Church *is* Church – with God's grace in the light and darkness of the 'already and not yet' – in as much as all the dimensions of her existence are imbued by the Gospel, defining and animating her historic mission in service to the coming of God's Kingdom among humankind.

'The entire Gospel contained in that cry'

In ways that could not be more definitive, Chiara Lubich's charism of unity focuses on the Gospel, the Gospel which is Jesus himself, and which is 'contained in that cry' of Jesus on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (cf. Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). It is really there that the Gospel completely unfolds. There is contained the 'secret wound' that pierces Jesus' soul. There the Church is born and forever reborn as a mature expression of God's love and humanity's response wherein the light and life of the Holy Spirit is brought forth through this infinite act of love between the Father and Son made flesh. There, Heaven and Earth are eternally embraced in unity.

Antonio Rosmini's message in *Of the Five Wounds of the Holy Church* -- directed to Jesus'

disciples in the mid-19th century – was certainly prophetic. In fact, when such a message is carefully interpreted and wisely put into practice in today's reality, it appears remarkably relevant. The Second Vatican Council, too, brought a leap forward in the Church's mission that cannot be overestimated and it is not insignificant that Pope Francis has tenaciously and decisively set the course for God's people toward a complete reform of life and mission in a manner unparalleled in the Church's two-thousand-year journey until now.

Eyes to See

I am convinced that in order to look with the gaze of Jesus - insofar as is possible through the 'limitless' Paschal gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:34) – at the wounds afflicting the body of the Church today so as to transform them through God's merciful logic, the Holy Spirit is inviting us to see with the eyes of the "secret wound" of Jesus Forsaken. Chiara, in her mystical writings dating back to the summer of 1949, describes Jesus Forsaken both as the "pupil of God's Eye" and the "window of God open onto the world and [the] window by which humanity sees God."

Last December 7th, 2019 in Trent (Italy), during the opening of the year-long exhibition in commemoration of the centenary of Chiara Lubich's birth, Archbishop Lauro Tisi passionately called everyone to deepen their understanding and share with others the fundamental importance of Jesus Forsaken. "The God of Chiara," said the Archbishop, is 'the revelation of a God indelibly characterized by faithfulness to gift and to love. It is a message of incredible actuality for today!' He continued, "We need to turn God's narrative upside down, to legitimize this God whose faithfulness to the gift and to the other is his essential, unique and unrepeatable nature. Christians fail to exist outside of this reality and harm is caused when the Church abandons this narrative."

Turning the narrative on its head

Thus, it is a turning of God's narrative upside down so that the 'outward-gazing' Church may take the high road in this 'new phase of evangelization'. It is not the path of 'the wide and open way,' (cf. EG §1) but one of 'the narrow gate' and arduous journey (cf. Mt 7:13-14) which are all contained 'in that cry'.

Departing from *this* narrative, and through the grace of the resurrection, I will briefly mention crucial areas of the Church's mission in which the five great wounds of the Church today can be transfigured into beams of light and new life. By doing this we will complete the definitive exodus from the current situation of Christianity which Pope Francis invited us to make in his traditional Christmas address to the Roman Curia on December 21st, 2019.

1. From obscurity to dawn's new light.

The first wound is that of an *obscured* Gospel. Yes, in this period marking the end of modernity, the Gospel has been eclipsed. Its vibrant, appealing light no longer shines in the hearts and minds of men and women. Not only that, a tragic dark night casts its shadow across the West, over all who are disillusioned, indifferent, doubtful or tongue-tied before the Gospel message of joy, light, life, justice and fraternity. Its fire no longer seems to burn

in the hearts and minds of Jesus' disciples. And for wide swaths of humanity – such as the immense civilizations of Asia – the Gospel's light has not yet shone.

The first wound to get beyond, focusing on Jesus Forsaken, is the one that blocks our recovery through a direct contact with the intense and stimulating light of Love pouring forth from the Gospel and transfiguring us into passionate witnesses. This light shines on the new, wonderful and overpowering face of God that is all and only love, ablaze with mercy for humanity and the created world. Only by courageously going beyond this wound and becoming free from the weight of false fears and over caution, can we again set free an evangelical revolution capable of inflaming hearts and illuminating minds in a time of hope for humanity.

For this not to remain a mere utopia, we must again grasp the sources of God's love with both hands: the Word and the Eucharist - with a faith which is pure and immaculate - like that of Mary. We must go back to be the beating heart and nourishment of the precious and irreplaceable life of the Church's mission. In this way, through the concrete reality of our relations, thoughts and actions, a living way can be experienced as a fruit of the Eucharist: the Church as the spouse of Jesus - charity and unity.

2. From privatization to Gospel encounter

The second wound is a privatized, personalized Gospel, one reduced to the individual, private sphere, as if it contained only consoling religious messages for 'good souls' without the historic provocation of the incarnation in all its social and public relevance. No! The Gospel of Jesus Forsaken is the proclamation of the coming of God's Kingdom to persons, cultures, and peoples of every time and place and at the service of a justice and solidarity that prioritizes the poor, the forgotten and the rejected. The Gospel, the incarnation of the life of the Son of God, of Trinitarian life, seeks to proclaim: 'it is good that the other should be!'; 'I am because you are,'; 'I am, so that you may be'. It is the incarnation made flesh and blood in the history of the men and women of our time.

Of course, this only happens where and when the secret of the Son of God's incarnation is contemplated and lived in the light of the paschal event. Only where and when we bear witness to his lowering himself in love and faithfulness to the very point of every forsakenness, that Jesus shows that life is stronger than death, that light illuminates darkness, that peace overcomes conflict and that love is stronger than hate. Infinitely stronger. Because this is the infinity of God!

The Gospel's incarnation in history should learn a new expression from the Forsaken One. It is not by building a fortress that we confront enemies but by offering a meeting tent in which each one finds themselves at home under the gaze of the Father of all and among brothers and sisters. It is the logic of hospitality, of gratuitousness, of fellowship.

3. From truncation to vibrant humanism

The third wound is that of a truncated or over-pruned Gospel speaking primarily to the full

realization of men without reference to women. Yet, does not the Gospel announce that in Jesus 'there is neither male nor female,' because in him we are all one (cf. Gal 3:28)?

Perhaps this is the first time we have become aware of it, but in the Church's mission today, it is almost as if a part of the Gospel is being left at the side of the road. Certainly in Church life throughout the centuries, the genius of women was highly praised. But it was praised primarily from a spiritual perspective and in relation to private life. The signs of the times, inspired by the Spirit and the Gospel's vitality itself, demand that we ford this river without wasting time in midstream.

The man-woman reciprocity seen between Jesus and Mary needs to be clearly, decisively, and actively translated into ecclesiastical and civic life. This should be done without reducing or limiting ourselves to models based on functional equality with currently male-dominated roles, but on the inescapable requirement of promoting the contribution and presence of women in ecclesial discernment and the decision-making processes. Instead, this all should be a result of an open and sincere dialogue between men and women, nourished by listening to the Gospel and mutual frankness (*parrhesia*). Joy and harmony result from a fulfilled humanism in which the respective and irreplaceable talents of both men and women are present in the life of the Church and where reciprocity is a convergence toward unity.

4. From a clericalized to a polyhydric Gospel

The fourth wound is a clericalized Gospel. In light of the unprecedented crisis that has overtaken the clerical world, there is an urgent need for far-reaching change. Taking the lid off the terrible reality of clerical abuse of minors - one justifiably described by Pope Francis as an undeniably symptomatic abuse of power (along with other problems) linked to the unacceptable perversions of the exercise, image and formation of ordained ministry at the heart of the Church.

To go beyond the wound means seeing the Church in a new way as People of God, as Vatican II intended, with God's people placed front and center in its ministry, charisms, vocations, and cultural expressions. This, however, means overcoming the simple – though never predictable – theoretical achievement of equal dignity and mission for all in the Church. In this way, there can be a harmonious symphony of that which is rightful to each one, a kind of synodal exercise of being Church, with the participation of all. We are just at the beginning but the Rubicon has been crossed.

Thanks to the persevering, demanding and liberating exercise of synodality at all levels, we can hope that the co-essential contribution of wonderful charisms, fruit of the Spirit's inexhaustible creativity, will continue to enrich the Church in synergy with the episcopal and priestly ministry, rendering this reality always more visible. Thus, by abandoning tendencies toward centralism, the dialogic of the universal and especially the perichoretic logic of the reflected polyhedron with its many faces converging in the white light from

which it springs, offers the world the miracle of a Church that is the People of God in their multiplicity and diversity.

5. From a silenced to an exultant Gospel

The last wound is that of a 'silenced Gospel' with an obvious loss of the Church's missionary zeal and commitment. On the one hand the Gospel is now sidelined in many social and political contexts and often accompanied by subtle forms of persecution, while on the other there is an irreversible thrust toward planetary uniformity of all human expressions through technocracy's seductive and suffocating tentacles of uniformity. Both extremes call for the leaven of a new Soul and only the open arms of Jesus' Gospel can offer the needed answer here!

But two other aspects of this wound must also be overcome: The proclamation of the Gospel in the imposing form of a beautifully packaged set of predefined truths and in a relativistic dialogue used as a way of justifying irreconcilable differences impossible to transcend. As Pope Paul VI prophetically envisioned in *Ecclesiam suam*, overcoming that wound means the Gospel must be transmitted as a witness freely offered: poor, powerless, like fertile soil awaiting an encounter with today's world. In this way, the Gospel will again be a principle of renewal that speaks to the deepest dynamisms at the heart of culture and human destiny.

With her gaze fixed on Jesus Forsaken, Chiara Lubich spoke of a 'God, the God of Jesus, [who] is there when he is lost' when the precious, essential seed of the Gospel falls onto the earth, decaying and dying to give new life and light to humanity's journey. Only in this way, by being poor for the poor and present at the farthest societal and existential outskirts, can the Church carry forth its mission in service of the coming of God's Kingdom today, becoming deeply involved in the making of history. But through this persevering prayer, this fervent invocation, made one in that cry of Jesus, for 'new heavens and a new earth.'